



**Dimension 2011  
Got Languages?  
Powerful Skills for the  
21st Century**

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## **Review and Acceptance Procedures**

### **SCOLT *Dimension***

The procedures through which articles are reviewed and accepted for publication in the proceedings volume of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT) begin with the submission of a proposal to present a session at the SCOLT Annual Conference. Once the members of the Program Committee have made their selections, the editor invites each presenter to submit a manuscript that might be suitable for publication in *Dimension*, the annual volume of conference proceedings.

Only those persons who present *in person* at the annual Conference are eligible to have written versions of their presentations included in *Dimension*. The names and academic affiliations of the authors and information identifying schools and colleges cited in articles are removed from the manuscripts prior to review by members of the Editorial Board, all of whom are professionals committed to second language education. The initial draft of each manuscript is reviewed by at least two members of the Editorial Board, and one of the following recommendations is made: “accept as is,” “request a second draft with minor revisions,” “request a second draft with major revisions,” or “do not publish.” The editor then requests second drafts of manuscripts that receive favorable ratings on the initial draft. These revised manuscripts are reviewed a second time before a final decision to publish is made.

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## Introduction

The Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT) held its annual conference March 10-12, 2011, at the Crowne Plaza in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in collaboration with the Louisiana Foreign Language Teachers Association (LFLTA) and the Southeastern Association of Language Learning Technology (SEALLT). Those individuals whose proposals were accepted for conference sessions or workshops were invited to submit a manuscript for review and possible inclusion in *Dimension 2011*. The articles selected for the present volume treat a broad range of topics of interest to professionals in the field of language teaching.

Christina Huhn examines our past and future as a profession in “21st Century World Language Education: Issues of Target Language Use.” This article focuses on the importance of the use of the target language by teachers and learners. Lynne McClendon, SCOLT’s Executive Director, expands upon the work of Huhn in “Got Languages? Powerful Skills for the 21st Century.” This article describes expectations for language use beyond the classroom based upon the work of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

In “Hybrid Language Teaching and Learning: Assessing Pedagogical and Curricular Issues,” Joshua Thoms discusses changes in pedagogy and the appropriate use of technology in contemporary language learning and language instruction. Thoms also offers explanations for the proliferation of hybrid instruction, ranging from effective models of computer-assisted language learning to recent economic downturns and threats of program cuts.

Starting in *Dimension 2009*, the editorial team began a new tradition of contacting a keynote speaker or session presenter from a previous conference to submit a manuscript for review. These manuscripts undergo the same review process as all other submissions. “Perceptions of the Culture and Communications Standards” is based upon a workshop given by Jana Sandarg, ACTFL’s 2008 recipient of the Florence Steiner Award, and Carol Wilkerson. These authors discuss the role of grammar and culture based on feedback from students studying abroad and the faculty who taught them.

This year the editorial team also contacted Susan Wehling for permission to reprint “Service-learning and Foreign Language Acquisition: Working with the Migrant Community,” an article published in *Dimension ‘99*. Wehling graciously consented to our request and added an update that describes how the project has evolved over the past three decades. Wehling’s work in the field, in the classroom, and in print underscores the importance of languages in the 21st century, the theme of this year’s SCOLT conference.

Over the years, Rosalie Cheatham has published and reviewed many articles in *Dimension*. This year she served as senior reviewer for *Dimension 2011*. In this role, Rosalie reviewed every manuscript that was submitted. The editorial team thanks Rosalie for her flexibility as we experimented with the duties of senior reviewer for this publication.

In the summer of 2010, the SCOLT Board invited Peter Swanson to serve as co-editor of *Dimension 2011*. Peter has published in *Dimension* and numerous other journals on topics related to language learning and language teaching, and he used this expertise in his role as co-editor.

On behalf of the editorial team, we hope that readers will find the articles in this edition to be informative and helpful. During the conference, please thank the authors for making time to write and revise the articles that you are about to read; thank the current and former reviewers for their assistance to their colleagues with the preparation of the articles; and thank the SCOLT Sponsors and Patrons for their ongoing financial support that makes *Dimension* possible.

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# 1

## 21st Century World Language Education: Issues of Target Language Use

**Christina Huhn**  
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### **Abstract**

*World language educators face many challenges progressing into the 21st century. This research describes the practices of world language educators and presents a rich description of what constitutes an engaging 21st century world language classroom. The use of the target language as a crucial component in the world language classroom as well as barriers and challenges to its use emerged from this qualitative research. Among the obstacles identified are variations in pedagogical approaches, support of target language use, issues of language choice, and conflict between student and teacher perspectives. The research also highlights the benefits of professional development.*

### **Background**

World language educators face many challenges progressing into the 21st century. Among them are the pedagogical practices observed in current classrooms. In West Virginia, there have been many informal conversations about these issues, but despite identification and recognition, there has been no formal evaluation of them. An examination of these problems is necessary for the improvement, expansion, and potentially the future funding of world language education at all levels. The lack of available data for planning professional development opportunities also hinders applications for grants.

In collaboration with the West Virginia Foreign Language Teachers Association and the West Virginia Department of Education, an online survey was developed. The survey was sent to language teachers, administrators, and other professionals in the field throughout the state to gain insight into the current practices of world language educators at all levels and to identify the aspects of world language instruction that needed improvement. The results of this study begin to paint a picture of the world language educators in the state, as well as some of their classroom practices and the reasons behind them. The responses gathered provide useful and pertinent information for teacher education programs and practicing teachers, and they can help guide the implementation of professional development and support.

One emerging theme was the use of the target language in the 21st century world language classroom. In 2010, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) added the following position statement to its list of recommendations for world language teaching: “ACTFL . . . recommends that language educators and their students use the target language as exclusively as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction during instructional time and, when feasible, beyond the classroom” (ACTFL, 2010, p. 1). ACTFL’s position reflects the notion that the use of the target language promotes comprehensible input, negotiates meaning, and encourages self-expression as well as opportunities to use language spontaneously, to learn language strategies, and, thus, to receive feedback (ACTFL, 2010). This recent statement reaffirms Krashen’s (1981) earlier work showing that language acquisition occurs when students are exposed to communicative and comprehensible language input rather than an overemphasis on grammar, translation, or drill exercises.

Additionally, the Center for Applied Linguistics completed a ten-year survey in 2008 that compiled data on the use of the target language in the world language classroom. Thirty-six percent of world language teachers reported using the target language more than 75% of the time in their classroom versus 22% in 1997 (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2008). These figures indicate an upward trend in the use of the target language in the classroom nationwide. Such information supports the notion that it is important to investigate the role that this practice plays in the 21st century world language classrooms, in particular, in West Virginia.

### *Varied Pedagogical Approaches*

Numerous inquiries have been completed in recent years on the 21st century world language classroom and the difficulties in implementing the target language. Many researchers have concluded that teachers hold a wide variety of interpretations concerning communicative language teaching and theories on the use of the target language in the classroom. Defining communicative language teaching and appropriate use of the target language for the 21st century world language classroom can be difficult (Edstrom, 2006). As a result, teachers usually take an eclectic approach to instruction and use what works for the topic at hand (Cook, 2001). These individuals recognize that sometimes it is necessary to take the path of least resistance in the classroom, and many times they are not fully aware of which language they are using (Morris, 2001; Wilkerson, 2008). Despite these diverse interpretations, research supports the benefits of maximizing the use of the target language in the classroom. It is, after all, the main source of comprehensible input and meaningful interaction, in particular for learners with limited or no access to communities that speak the target language (Kim & Elder, 2008; Thompson, 2006).

However, research does not support the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom. Research favors the use of both English and the target language given what is known about linguistic variations and code switching (Thompson, 2006). Overreliance on either English or the target language can be

disadvantageous for students. Too much English, especially when class is students' only exposure to the target language, robs students of learning opportunities (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). In the reality of the classroom, teachers need to employ all resources at their disposal, including the prior knowledge, and it is important to view both languages as tools.

### *Language Choice*

Use of the target language in the 21st century language classroom remains world language teachers' primary means to help students develop language skills, appreciate cultures other than their own, and transfer what they practice in the classroom into a real world context. Research indicates that language learning is an experiential process (Crawford, 2004), and students must interact with the various aspects of a language if they are to be true 21st century world language learners.

It is also important to note that if teachers do not use the target language, it sends a strong implicit message about the value of the language and the need to speak it. While some may claim the classroom is an artificial environment, to the students it remains very real; and students seem to view teachers' use of target language as natural, even if they respond in English themselves. Consistent use of the target language by teachers engages students in the learning process (Crichton, 2009)

The decision to use English or the target language in the classroom stems from four groups of factors.

**Students:** Classroom behavior and discipline matters are challenges that frequently inhibit teachers from using the target language (Bateman, 2008). There are situations in the classroom when speaking English may get the students' attention more effectively than speaking the target language (Cook 2001). Teachers identified students' ability level and their anxiety as factors that limited use of the target language in the classroom. Acceptance of the target language on the part of students often affects the teacher's choice of language. Many teachers, concerned that their students would not be receptive to their use of the target language in specific circumstances, chose to speak English instead (Kim & Elder, 2008; Wilkerson, 2008).

**Teachers:** Teacher attitudes, confidence, background, fatigue, motivation, fear of overloading students in their learning efforts, and pedagogical views, especially regarding grammar instruction are all elements that determine language preference (Bateman, 2008; Edstrom, 2006; Kim & Elder, 2008; Wilkerson, 2008). Other factors, such as departmental culture and colleagues who do not incorporate the target language as part of their instruction, can also pose challenges. While teachers may believe in the value of using the target language, their classroom procedures tend to vary greatly (Morris, 2001). Their language choice may be based on what they have observed in their own teachers, what they have learned

from the student teaching experience, or from participation in professional development opportunities (Bateman, 2008; Morris, 2001).

**External factors:** A lack of time to cover a large amount of material to meet specific curricular goals can also inhibit instruction in the target language and limit opportunities to apply the target language to more realistic contexts (Morris, 2001). Societal attitudes towards other cultures and language learning can further hinder instruction in the target language (Kim & Elder, 2008; Morris, 2001).

**Language specific:** Classes made up of students with a wide range of abilities makes implementation of the target language more difficult. It can be challenging to maintain attention and motivation in the classroom if the teacher is confronted with a broad spectrum of student abilities. Using English to circumvent communication breakdowns is a strategy employed by many teachers. Finally, many teachers believe that there is a need to explain complex grammatical concepts in English (Kim & Elder, 2008; Morris, 2001).

### ***Conflict between Student and Teacher Perspectives***

Perhaps the most interesting trend noted in the literature is the discrepancy between student and teacher perspectives. Brown (2009) finds that beginning students in particular tend to have unrealistic and narrowly defined perspectives of language learning. While teachers value information exchange within a real-world context more than discrete grammar points, students appear to not value such communicative exchanges. Additionally, Brown notes that students tend to favor explicit grammar instruction. These student preferences may arise from comparisons between world language classes and other classes in which the information transmitted may be more explicit and precise.

Language choice has an effect on student motivation. If too much English is spoken, students will not recognize the need for the target language; excessive use of the target language may impede understanding and result in reduced student motivation (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Teachers tend to favor students using language earlier than the students prefer, especially among beginning students (Brown, 2009). To bridge the gap between conflicting student and teacher perspectives, it is important that teachers educate students about the communicative method and how it facilitates language acquisition. Brown (2009) suggests three specific areas of world language teaching that instructors should discuss with their students: error correction, grammar teaching, and paired or group work. Contrary to what some instructors might believe, not all students have a negative opinion of the target language use in the classroom nor do they feel that the use of English is essential to their learning.

Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney (2008) point out that understanding student attitudes and pre-conceptions is important in language teaching in order to foster improved communication in the language classroom. They began by investigating student perceptions of communicative language classrooms. The authors reported

that students felt they needed some English in order to reduce anxiety, avoid confusion, and understand instructions. Furthermore, use of English was found to aid understanding grammatical concepts. However, they found that students also recognized the need for exposure to the target language. Students understood the benefits of hearing the language, being immersed in it, and of having a context for their learning. Students acknowledged that while too much English can slow the learning process, it also provides an easy way out for some students and limits the learning for others. They understood how easy it is to become dependent on English, and they noted that they would be more likely to pay attention to the target language if English were not as readily provided. Furthermore, students recognize that overuse of English forces translation, in particular word-for-word translation.

Students tend to become anxious when presented with the use of the target language in the classroom (Krashen, 1981). Levine (2003) found that the strongest predictor of target language-use anxiety appears to be the amount of target language use itself. Students who reported higher target language use in their world language classes tended to report lower levels of anxiety about its use. Correspondingly, instructors who reported higher levels of target language use in their classes tended to perceive lower levels of target language-use anxiety in their students. Clearly, such a finding is important because an increase in target language use does not necessarily equal heightened anxiety for language learners. Levine suggests that many students feel comfortable with target language use once they become accustomed to it. Research conducted by Nicolson and Adams (2010) supports the use of the target language because they found that students were primarily satisfied to have their class taught mostly in the target language. In fact, students expected more Spanish as the course progressed. Even though some were intimidated initially, they readily accepted the value of having courses in the target language to aid learning.

### **Benefits of Professional Development**

One area of notable importance is the training and professional development opportunities available to teachers. While it is true that teacher education programs and professional development tend to push for the elimination or the reduction of English use in the classroom, it is also true that these same mechanisms support teachers in using the target language to its full potential. Teacher training should ensure that instructors are equipped with the necessary skills to incorporate a high proportion of the target language into their instructional practices. Additionally, they should be trained to understand the relationship between the target language and English as it relates to the classroom (Kim & Elder, 2008). Departmental promotion, course coordination, teacher research, and training play a large role in providing teachers with ways to implement the target language into their courses. Morris (2001) suggests that methodology courses can be significant in supporting or even challenging teachers' efforts to implement the target language in their classrooms. Teachers often mirror the practices of their former

instructors (Morris, 2001), and it is important that mentoring, whether direct or indirect, continue to be acknowledged as a valuable source of information and training and implemented in teacher training and professional development opportunities.

## **Methods**

In order to gain insight into what is currently occurring in 21st century world language classrooms in West Virginia, a qualitative online survey was developed. The questions used in this instrument were the result of collaborations between the president and the vice president of the West Virginia Foreign Language Teacher Association and the West Virginia World Language Coordinator. Questions were formulated from classroom observations, discussions, comments heard at conferences, and from informal discussions between teachers and faculty at all levels. The survey maintained a qualitative focus in order to allow trends and issues to surface. Close-ended questions were minimized.

Using the database of all world language educators in the state, the survey was sent by e-mail to 302 individuals. Seventy-three world language educators responded, for a response rate of 24%. Of the respondents, 56 were K-12 teachers, 18 were university faculty, and 4 were teachers or facilitators for the state's virtual school. Data were collected between April and June 2010.

## **Findings**

During the data analysis phase of the research, multiple issues surfaced which provide insight into the realities of the 21st century world language classroom in terms of best practices and use of the target language. Responses to the first question what constitutes a good world language classroom were grouped into several key areas. The most salient finding from the study was the definition of a good 21st century language classroom. Responses indicated that the classroom should be relaxed and comfortable and should support risk taking. Ideally, the teacher should be enthusiastic, energetic, and motivated. Participants noted that the learning environment should be student-centered and foster communication between the teacher and student as well as between students. Respondents specified teacher and student language fluency and language skills as a crucial element of a 21st century world language classroom.

Respondents also noted three categories that are important for quality language learning: a variety of instructional activities to help students build language skills, the use of authentic materials, and effective instruction using the target language. Additionally, the participants cited a variety of factors that affect language use in the classroom and students' attitudes that tend to hinder world language instruction. Finally, the participants discussed professional development.

### *Engaging Activities*

Teachers responded to a list of common activities used in a world language classroom compiled from informal discussions and observations of world language classrooms in the state. The response showed that educators at all levels were knowledgeable about many different types of activities. However, when asked about their classroom strategies, the most frequently used strategies were group work (51%), open-ended question-and-answer activities (47%), book work (43%), bell-ringers or warm-ups (35%), and worksheets (33%). Fifty-one of the 73 respondents (70%) identified a textbook as one of their main sources and 22 respondents (30%) listed the textbook as their only or primary source of instructional materials. Responses indicate that TPRS (Total Physical Response Storytelling), a strategy that involves storytelling and play-acting and enables prolonged exposure to the target language, was used least by participants in the survey.

### *Realia and Other Authentic Materials*

Participants indicated that the use of realia was an essential component of the 21st century classroom, especially when exposing students to culture. They noted that authentic materials can be a source of comprehensible input and motivation for students. Twenty-one respondents (29%) identified realia specifically as something they used to support their learning objectives. The use of newspapers or other materials was much more limited; only five of the respondents reported using them on a consistent basis. While many textbooks include these kinds of materials, having realia in a tangible form helps students develop a stronger appreciation for real language and culture. In particular, participants noted that the use of realia helps students make connections between their native language and the target language and overcomes barriers to language learning.

### *Classroom Use of Target Language*

Most respondents agreed with the benefits of using the target language in the classroom, and they expressed that effective modeling exposes students to the target language and culture(s). They stated that using the target language is a goal and obligation when teaching languages. As one respondent noted,

Use of the target language allows students to hear it as much as possible and to become accustomed to words and accents. Using the target language to talk to students and to give instructions allows them the opportunity to function in the language. There is also the psychological barrier to be overcome, the subconscious assumption that the new language is inferior to the native language for *real* communication. While this may

be true in a sense for the beginner, some students seem to have trouble realizing that in other places, people actually think in and use the new language in everyday situations.

When asked to rate their level of confidence in the target language, 65% of the respondents indicated they felt very confident in their language skills. One in five (20%) felt somewhat confident while 15% felt confident enough to teach, but recognized that they needed improvement. When asked how much they utilized the target language in the classroom, only 35% of all respondents used the target language more than 75% of the time. Twenty-one percent indicated that they use it 51-75% of the classroom time, and slightly less than half (44%) use it less than 50% of the time. Of that group, 16% responded that they use it less than a quarter of the time with students or not at all. University instructors reported using the most target language, with 69% indicating that they use it more than 75% of class time; and virtual school teachers used the least with less than 50% target language use. Forty-seven percent of middle school teachers and 42% of high school teachers who responded indicated that they used the target language 75% of the time.

When asked how much students use the target language, respondents reported that only 36% of the students use it for more than half of classroom time. Thirty-three percent of the sample indicated that students use the target language less than 25% or very little or not at all. This limited use of the target language by students was similar throughout all levels.

### *Factors Affecting Language Use in the Classroom*

Although educators appeared confident to teach using the target language, there appeared to be barriers to doing so. Respondents were asked to provide the reasoning behind their use, or lack of use, of the target language in the classroom. The primary issue identified as hampering target language use was classroom management. Respondents believed they spent too much time dealing with behavior problems and related matters and felt they needed to use English to maintain control and make instructional progress in the classroom. One respondent wrote

It is difficult to use the target language when you don't have full control of the students in your classroom. It also makes things very frustrating for students in level 1 classes because they really don't have any idea what I'm talking about and they have no desire to try to figure it out. It's also exhausting to keep up the constant game of charades.

Other respondents noted low student motivation as the reason behind their language choice. Teachers also noted that a lack of the time necessary to utilize the target language and allow students time to understand and respond also limited implementation of the target language.

Many respondents expressed concerns that students need to learn the structure of the language explicitly through grammar instruction in English or through translation of the target language into English. Respondents noted that without this structure, students would not learn the language properly, and they stated that students do not know the grammatical structures of their own language.

Additionally, respondents expressed concerns over student responses. A common theme was a lack of student effort or lack of response when teachers use the target language. In situations where students are taking the world language only to fulfill college entrance or graduation requirements, teachers believed that too much target language use would decrease student motivation. “[Students] don’t put a lot of effort into trying and have little faith in their abilities. They seem insecure and frightened to try. They think the only language they need to know is English.” Teachers also noted that in many school districts there is limited contact with native speaking communities, and lack of contact with native speakers can affect student responses. In addition, peer pressure was an important element that inhibited students from attempting to use the target language. Nevertheless, respondents recognized that it was their responsibility to set up the students to progress toward more confident language use and to build an appropriate comfort level in the classroom.

Respondents indicated that they wanted to use the target language more but were forced to scale back due to administrative or enrollment issues. One respondent explained, “I use [an immersion approach] often, especially with my Spanish I students, but the principal expects me not to use [it].” Incorporating the target language into instruction was found to be challenging when administration, parents, or other authorities are concerned about enrollments or about student complaints because they do not understand the target language. At the college level, these objections translated into negative student evaluations, and they appeared to have an effect on tenure and promotion. Participants also expressed concerns about class scheduling, indicating that classes that did not meet on a regular basis or met on a reduced schedule made use of the target language more difficult. The lower number of contact hours reduced student retention and willingness to accept the target language in the classroom.

### *Student Attitudes that Hinder Instruction*

A final issue identified as affecting the use of the target language in the classroom was the limitations of local culture and acceptance. Participants noted that many communities in West Virginia are small and lack a diverse population. Responses revealed that it was difficult for students to connect language study to the real world, and many parents question the value of and need for world language learning in their children’s lives. Teachers commented that the culture in the region is unreceptive, and many students feel that world language is a waste of time, and neither they nor their parents feel it is important. To overcome some of the challenges faced by teachers who want to use the target language in the classroom, some of respondents cited that it was effective to tailor their instruc-

tion to the class level and specific students. By gradually increasing exposure, students could become accustomed to communicating in the target language.

### *Participation in Professional Development*

To overcome some of the barriers to language teaching in a rural environment, respondents expressed the value of continued professional development to improve their knowledge and ability to use the target language. Many teachers indicated professional development opportunities help create a sense of community. Only 2 of the 73 indicated they did not currently pursue professional development opportunities. In both cases, they had been teaching for 15-20 years and no longer saw the benefits of investing time and money in professional development. When asked what type of professional development participants preferred, 67% indicated they attended state organized professional development activities. Twenty-five percent stated that they attended national conferences, and 21% reported attending regional world language conferences. Slightly more than half (53%) reported preference to attend state world language conferences. Fifty-three (73%) indicated that they participated in local meetings with other world language teachers. Despite the expressed value of strong language skills in the classroom and the benefits of target language use described above, only 32% indicated they participated in language immersion experiences. Program cost and time away from family were cited as primary barriers to participating in such experiences.

### **Discussion**

Survey responses were sought to describe 21st century world language classroom from language teachers' perspectives. When compared to national averages, West Virginia's language teachers reported using less target language in the classroom (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2008). The findings from this study helped to identify contributing factors associated with decreased time using the target language in the classroom. It was found that West Virginia's world language teachers used the textbook as one of their primary tools in the classroom. However, excessive reliance on the textbook appeared to detract from the focus on the target language, especially when the textbook used extensive English.

Data analysis indicated that these teachers remained concerned about the need to use English for explicit grammar explanations. While pedagogical reasons exist for doing so, given the knowledge base regarding linguistics and second language acquisition, it is important that world language teachers confront perceptual differences between language students and their teachers (Brown, 2009). Research shows that one of the reasons teachers use the target language less in class is fear that students will become anxious, a phenomenon described by Krashen (1981). Students tend to react more negatively and are more likely to be anxious if they are not accustomed to hearing and using the target language in their classroom (Levine, 2003). Therefore, it is essential to educate students on what they will experience in an environment enriched by the use of the target language (Brown, 2009). Furthermore, when administrators and other faculty members are confronted

with conflicts arising from the use of the target language in the classroom, understanding these perspectives can help build support for both instructors and students. (Brown, 2009).

Additionally, this study found attitudes of a community with limited exposure to the world languages and cultures may affect the use of the target language in the classroom. To overcome perceptions of the irrelevance of learning another language and culture, students, parents, and the community must be shown the educational benefits, values, and advantages derived from contact with other cultures and the reality that in the 21st century, a monolingual society is neither viable nor the norm.

Data from this qualitative survey support other research (Bateman, 2008; Morris, 2001) and help demonstrate that while teachers believe strongly in the advantages resulting from the use of the target language in the classroom, the realities of the classroom and other external factors influence their willingness or ability to do so. Finally, the importance of participation in professional development opportunities is essential for world language educators. It is through teacher training programs, conferences, and state professional development opportunities that teachers can gain support for and be encouraged to use the target language as the valuable tool it can be in the 21st century world language classroom. The opportunities should include coursework on language learning theories and second language acquisition, language immersion and study abroad experiences, conferences that focus on both theoretical knowledge and practical information to help teachers understand second language learners, and practical ways to address the challenges that arise in any classroom. Teachers should be persuaded to attend these conferences and supported financially wherever possible. Additionally, given the value of mentoring, those who have been successful in implementing the target language into the classroom should be provided opportunities to share their knowledge with their fellow teachers.

Findings from this study can serve to help educators and governing bodies to determine the types of professional development needed to increase the use of the target language in the classroom. They may also serve as a way to educate the community and school administrators on what to expect from a good 21st century world language classroom. Matters counterproductive to implementing these best practices for even the most well trained instructor include a lack of classroom time, questions of classroom management, student response, student and parental attitudes, administrative response, and very limited exposure to other cultures. The results of this survey reveal the need for continued support and professional development for our teachers as well as education of the general public regarding the value of world languages and a broader worldview.

Nevertheless, this research has its limitations. One issue that arose was difficulty in reaching all world language educators in the state ( $N = 487$ ). Currently, the primary method of contacting a geographically scattered population is an electronic mailing list. However, participation is strictly voluntary, and not all world language educators subscribe.

Findings from this study show that it is important to know more about the types of activities world language teachers use in their classrooms, the textbooks teachers use, and why they choose to use such materials. In-class observations of world language teachers and qualitative interviews would serve to increase the knowledge regarding 21st century world language classrooms. World language teachers face many challenges in providing quality language instruction to 21st century learners and additional research is clearly warranted.

Note:

1. The survey is available online at <https://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=en&pli=1&formkey=dF9lcUhZbTVuUFpMdUktS053Y1h1VWc6MA#gid=0>

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# 2

## Got Languages? Powerful Skills for the 21st Century

**Lynne McClendon**

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The theme for the 46th conference reflects the growing recognition of the value of language acquisition as a tool for 21st century citizens. Being able in another language to communicate information, know-how, and expertise—all rooted in content knowledge and application—elevates the level at which a person is capable of interacting. America's future, from many reports, is increasingly going to need precisely this type of interaction from its citizens to keep our country competitive and in a leadership role. However, the educational system has yet to embrace a comprehensive plan for ensuring students have access to quality articulated long-sequenced programs of language study. At least one program on the national landscape, the *Partnership for the 21st Century Skills*, has included foreign language study in its attempt to reexamine the educational direction for the United States.

The *Partnership for 21st Century Skills* (P21) was founded in 2002 through a collaboration of the U.S. Department of Education and several organizations: AOL Time Warner Foundation, Apple Computer, Inc., Cable in the Classroom, Cisco Systems, Inc., Dell Computer Corporation, Microsoft Corporation, National Education Association, and SAP. This organization's mission was to build collaborative partnerships among education, business, community, and government leaders. These partners sought to develop a snapshot of the sort of education a person living and working in the 21st century would need to be self-sustaining and a productive member of society. The snapshot would provide direction for redesigning educational systems to support those needs.

The Partnership went directly to the educational and business communities to take the pulse of the nation from the standpoint of what employers saw the workforce needing in knowledge and skills to continue, improve, and grow business and industry of the United States. Through surveys and other research approaches, various themes emerged, and they helped formulate the P21 Framework, which is outlined in the following pages.

The Partnership has endured some criticism that its focus seems to highlight skills rather than a mastery of core academic subjects, but with any emerging document, the scope and multiple components of such an undertaking may seem skewed. The educational focus for years has been on basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills and content knowledge. While today these basic

educational building blocks are and will be still needed, learners also need an array of other skills. The work of the P21 has sought to identify other skills, and hence, such research has given rise to the notion that core academic subjects are somehow less important, which is not the case. The Framework and other 21st Century documents view all the components as fully interconnected for 21st century teaching and learning.

What follows are excerpts from two documents published by the *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*, and they are reprinted here by permission from this organization. The first excerpt is taken from *The MILE Guide: Milestones for Improving Learning and Education* (2009), and it shows an overview of the core subjects, skills, and themes. The overview is provided to give readers some insight into the nature of this educational framework. Readers are invited to view all the documents and the organizational history at <<http://www.p21.org/>>. It is important to understand that the P21 does not prescribe one way to “get on board” but allows states to show how their plan supports the P21 principles. Readers may view various state approaches outlined at the P21 Web site.

The second excerpt is taken from *Are They Really Ready for Work?*, which is a longer document produced by the joint efforts of The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management (2006). The focus of the surveys taken in 2006 was directed at obtaining a corporate perspective on the readiness of new entrants into the U.S. workforce.

Respondents rated skills based using a Likert scale from *Not Important* to *Very Important*. The readiness level was assessed using a similar scale labeled *Deficient*, *Adequate*, and *Excellent*. Finally, employers were asked to rate the increase or the decrease in importance of these same skills and the importance of emerging content areas over the next five years. The final rating was selected for inclusion in this article because one of the important emerging content areas addresses foreign languages. To be fair, this extensive report covers many aspects of workforce readiness of which foreign language does receive some recognition.

## **P21 Framework Overview and 21st Century Student Outcomes**

The P21 has developed a unified, collective vision for 21st century learning that will strengthen American education. The Partnership created the *Framework for 21st Century Learning*, which describes the knowledge, skills, and expertise students must master to succeed in work and life. The *Framework* presents a vision for 21st century student outcomes, a blending of content knowledge, specific skills, expertise and literacies, and the support systems that are needed to produce these outcomes.

### *Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes*

Mastery of core academic subjects is the base upon which all 21st century learning occurs. Core subjects include English, reading or language arts, foreign languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history, government, and civics. Schools must support students in developing deep mastery of core academic subjects while integrating 21st century interdisciplinary themes into these academic subject areas. These themes include Global Awareness, Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy, Civic Literacy, Health Literacy, and Environmental Literacy.

Next, learning and innovation skills are what separate students who are prepared for increasingly complex life and work environments in the 21st century and those who are not. This set of skills includes Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, and Communication and Collaboration skills. Additionally, people in the 21st century live in a technology and media-driven environment, marked by access to an abundance of information, rapid changes in technology tools, and the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions on an unprecedented scale. To be effective in the 21st century, citizens and workers must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills related to information, media, and technology. These skills can be categorized as Information Literacy, Media Literacy, and ICT (Information, Communications and Technology) Literacy.

In addition to the aforementioned skills, today's life and work environments require far more than thinking skills and content knowledge. The ability to navigate the complex life and work environments in the globally competitive information age requires students to pay rigorous attention to developing adequate life and career skills. To do so, students must have high degrees of flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, and social and cross-cultural skills as well as being productive and accountable in the workplace. Moreover, they should have strong leadership skills and act responsibly.

### *21st Century Support Systems*

Developing a comprehensive framework for 21st century learning requires more than identifying specific skills, content knowledge, expertise and literacies. An innovative support system must be created to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities required of them in the 21st century. The Partnership has identified five critical support systems that ensure student mastery of 21st century skills. I will provide a brief description of these support systems, the first of which are 21st Century Standards. These standards should reflect an integration of academic content knowledge and 21st century skills that are both observable and measurable as well as communicate the larger picture that informs teaching and learning to allow for deep mastery. The second, Assessments of 21st Century Skills, talks about a greater variety of assessments both formative and summative.

Also, portfolios and capstone projects should be added, as appropriate, to capture and measure student output to inform the learner of understanding, application, and progress as well as weaknesses for improvement and feedback for instructional implementation.

21st Century Curriculum and Instruction was identified as the third support system that has 21st century skills embedded in the academic content as a cohesive, interrelated unit. Additionally, instructional practices include more student-centered activities, authentic application of knowledge and understanding, differentiated instruction, and student-input into the lesson design. Next, teachers should have access to professional development opportunities regardless of time and place, including job-embedded activities. The nature of the 21st Century Professional Development should help teachers integrate content knowledge and skills in their own instructional and assessment practices. Finally, 21st Century Learning Environments are called for. Appropriate physical space and access to technology are important supports that help students master both core content and skills.

#### *Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of Increasing Importance.*

This section discusses findings from the surveys given to gauge employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st Century workforce in the United States. Specific to foreign language study, it was noted that only 11% of employer respondents consider foreign language as *Very Important* for current job performance for high school or college graduates. Yet, when asked to project the changing importance of all 20 basic knowledge areas and applied skills over the next five years, nearly two-thirds (63%) report that knowledge of a *Foreign Language* is a basic skill that will "increase in importance" ranking it higher than any other basic skill queried. Related topics that appear in a separate question about emerging content areas support the growing importance of *Foreign Languages*. When asked to select which emerging content areas will be *most critical* in the near future, roughly half of the employer respondents selected *Use of Non-English Languages as a Tool for Understanding Other Nations, Markets, and Cultures* (49%), and *Demonstrate Understanding of Global Markets and the Economic and Cultural Impacts of Globalization* (53%). In follow-up interviews, several individuals emphasized the importance of knowing foreign languages and understanding other cultures and their relevance in global work environments. Randy Steinhoff of Quest Diagnostics stated,

We have employees in Mexico, Belgium, and the UK, and we conduct business in several international markets directly or through joint ventures. Foreign languages are important in a global economy. In the past, we had not paid enough attention to this. Now, knowledge of foreign languages is in our leadership profile. We're asking people what languages they speak.

Annette Byrd of GlaxoSmithKline adds to Steinhoff and points out the advantages of knowing a foreign language, stating that

We are a global company with many people working on global teams and traveling to other countries. If they speak another language when on a global team or attend a meeting in another country, they are so much further ahead of their colleagues who have no foreign language skills.

Byrd also noted that in many GlaxoSmithKline facilities in other countries, the employees speak English because it is a required language in schools. In contrast, the United States Department of Education indicates that fewer than 8% of U.S. undergraduates take a foreign language class in a given year, and fewer than 2% study abroad. Most colleges do not require much study of foreign languages, nor are foreign languages emphasized in U.S. elementary and secondary schools, unlike schools in other industrialized nations (Haurwitz, 2006).

## Conclusion

Whether our own states or our own districts and institutions are officially part of P21, we can support such an integration of content knowledge and the skill of learning to use a world language to communicate, to collaborate, and to be productive. Technology allows language learners access to opportunities beyond their own doors, and as language educators, we must continually employ best technological practices in instructional and assessment habits. Beyond ensuring that classroom instruction is in line with P21 goals, world languages practitioners must share this approach with students, parents, administration, community, and elected officials to help them understand the vital role that world languages study has in the educational life of P-16 students. For further information about P21, readers are encouraged to visit the Web site < <http://www.p21.org> >.

## Notes:

1. The Partnership views all the components as fully interconnected in the process of 21st century teaching and learning.

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# 3

## Hybrid Language Teaching and Learning: Assessing Pedagogical and Curricular Issues

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### **Abstract**

*In recent years, several economic factors have led to an increase in the number of hybrid courses offered in foreign language departments at the post-secondary level in the U. S. Hybrid courses incorporate several technological applications not typically used in a traditional face-to-face course. Hybrid courses combine contact time in a traditional classroom with virtual days, in which students are responsible for working with content on their own or in small groups outside of the classroom. This study reports on student and instructor perceptions of and reactions to a hybrid course piloted in three lower-level Spanish language courses at a large university in the southern region of the U.S. It examines the challenges and benefits of offering hybrid Spanish language courses by discussing student and instructor responses to surveys and interviews administered over an academic year. The study also includes a brief review of some of the technologies used in the hybrid Spanish language courses.*

### **Background**

Hybrid language teaching and learning, also referred to as blended learning, is becoming a popular model for the delivery of foreign language (FL) courses at the post-secondary level in the U.S. (Thoms, 2009). A hybrid approach involves adapting traditional face-to-face FL courses so that they meet fewer times and incorporating a number of interactive, online activities so that students continue to work with the content outside of the physical classroom during virtual work days. Several factors have contributed to the proliferation of hybrid models of instruction in FL programs in the U.S. One of these factors is a more thorough understanding of how computer-assisted language learning, when informed by second language acquisition theories, can facilitate learners' abilities to acquire the FL. Some researchers (Payne & Ross, 2005; Payne & Whitney, 2002; Smith, 2003) explore the various ways in which learners obtain and process input via technology. Studies in this area indicate that technology has the ability to provide learners with authentic input while simultaneously providing them opportunities to practice with and produce language. Other researchers (Blake & Zyzik, 2003;

Darhower, 2008; Smith, 2009) focus their attention on how specific technologies, such as online synchronous chats, can allow learners to notice and correct linguistic errors more efficiently than traditional, face-to-face contexts. Another area of research looks at the ways in which technology easily allows learners to interact with native speakers to better understand facets of the FL culture and to develop intercultural competence (Darhower, 2006; Dubreil, 2006; Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Mailliet, 2001; Lomicka, 2006; von der Emde, Schneider, & Kötter, 2001).

At the post-secondary level, many educators are required or soon will be required to offer more hybrid and online FL courses in order to meet student demand. The U.S. Department of Education projects a 13% increase in the total number of students pursuing a college degree between 2007 and 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Blake (2008) states that "It is doubtful that all of these students, or at least anyone who wants access to higher education, will find seats in a classroom setting as presently configured" (p. 5). Additionally, many FL textbook publishers appear to acknowledge these ongoing enrollment challenges as more texts now include additional interactive online components that allow instructors more flexibility to plan courses that can be taught in and outside of the classroom.

Another factor that plays a role in the growing number of hybrid course offerings is the economy. Given the recent economic downturn in the U.S., many institutions' budgets have been reduced, which has directly affected how FL programs, both large and small, deliver their courses. Administrators in many universities either are eliminating FL programs or proposing that FL programs adopt a hybrid model to use resources more efficiently (Rubio & Thoms, in press). While these recent changes have been met with some anxiety and frustration by those who have vested interests in the FL programs, many across the country have acknowledged the fact that hybrid and online FL courses will factor prominently in how courses are offered at the post-secondary level in the future (Blake, 2008).

### **Researching the Effects of Hybrid Courses**

While hybrid models of teaching and learning continue to emerge in a number of FL programs across the country, only a handful of studies have investigated the effects of these models on students' ongoing FL linguistic development. Results from the few studies that compare hybrid versus face-to-face FL courses (Echávez-Solano, 2003; Goertler & Winke, 2008; Scida & Saury, 2006) either show that there is no difference between the two formats with respect to students' FL proficiency or indicate that students in a hybrid course outperform students enrolled in a traditional face-to-face course on a number of measures. Adair-Hauck, Willingham-Mclain, and Youngs (2000) found that students enrolled in a hybrid second-semester French course that met three days per week and incorporated a heavy technology component performed equally well in listening and speaking measures when compared to students in a traditional face-to-face course that met four days per week. In addition, the researchers found that the students in the

hybrid course performed better on writing and reading assessment tasks than students in the traditional face-to-face course. Chenoweth, Ushida, and Murday (2006) examined the outcomes of two elementary and intermediate French and Spanish courses in blended versus conventional face-to-face formats. Their findings indicate that there were no significant differences between the two formats in both languages across a number of measures, such as listening and reading comprehension, grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, and written and oral production. In another study, Blake, Wilson, Cetto, and Pardo-Ballester (2008) found few statistically significant differences in students' speaking development when comparing a hybrid to a comparable face-to-face Spanish course. Similarly, Young (2008) found little variation on a number of linguistic measures between a group of students learning Spanish in a hybrid course and another group in a traditional, face-to-face format. Finally, McBride and Wildner-Bassett (2008) present data from a content-based course that used a blended learning format. They analyzed an upper-level, content-based German undergraduate course that focused on cultural differences between men and women that are unique to German culture. They concluded that the face-to-face discussion format in the classroom, coupled with a threaded, asynchronous computer-mediated discussion, promoted learners' ability to co-construct meaning of the course content, which allowed for shifts in students' perspectives about German culture regarding gender issues.

In sum, the research carried out to date on hybrid or blended learning contexts has focused primarily on the learning outcomes of students. The majority of the learning outcomes analyzed have focused on linguistic proficiency, and a few studies have examined how the use of technology in hybrid courses has affected students' ability to understand FL cultural information.

### **Purpose of Current Study**

While ongoing research continues to shed light on how hybrid FL courses affect students' linguistic development, no study to date has looked at how students and instructors perceive their learning and teaching abilities and their roles in a hybrid learning context. This study presents survey and interview data that discuss how students and instructors of three lower-level Spanish language courses react to hybrid courses. It also discusses the challenges and advantages of teaching a hybrid language course. The findings will help inform pedagogical and curricular concerns related to FL courses offered in a hybrid format.

### **Methods**

#### *Participants and Course Description*

Students participating in this study were enrolled in three different lower-level Spanish language courses at a large university in the southern U.S. during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semesters. The undergraduate students primarily were taking the courses to fulfill a FL requirement for their major. A description of the hybrid course was made available to students when they registered for classes,

and each student had the option to enroll either in a traditional, face-to-face Spanish language course or a hybrid course. The Spanish program at the university spent the previous academic year developing and piloting the curricula for the three lower-level Spanish language hybrid courses.

Two adjunct faculty and one graduate student teaching assistant agreed to teach the same three hybrid Spanish language courses. One of the adjunct faculty members had 10 years of experience teaching traditional Spanish language courses at the post-secondary level, the other adjunct faculty member had 17 years of experience, and the graduate student teaching assistant had 2 years of post-secondary teaching experience at the time of his interview near the end of the spring 2010 semester. The instructors had taught using a hybrid model of instruction for 1 to 2 years at the time of the study.

While traditional sections of the lower-level courses met four days per week in a face-to-face, classroom environment, the hybrid courses met in a classroom three days per week and incorporated one virtual work day in which students completed online activities on their own outside of the classroom. There was no difference between the traditional and hybrid courses with respect to the number of assignments, exams, quizzes, or compositions. Students in the hybrid sections were assigned online grammar modules, cultural, and listening activities to complete during their virtual work days. In addition, supplementary grammar and lexical exercises were assigned to the students in the hybrid sections from the online workbook that accompanied the textbook.

### *Web-based Applications*

The instructors utilized four Web-based applications to provide students additional practice with and exposure to various facets of the target language and culture during their virtual work days. The first Web site, *Phonetics: The sounds of spoken language* <<http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/#>>, is dedicated to providing information regarding the phonetic makeup of English, Spanish, and German. Users can click on individual phones in each language and hear an audio recording of the sound, watch a step-by-step illustration of how each sound is physically produced, or watch and hear a video of a native speaker producing the sound in isolation or in sample words. Given that hybrid courses meet fewer days than traditional, face-to-face courses, students often are concerned about the development of their oral proficiency in the FL. Sites such as *Phonetics: The sounds of spoken language* can mitigate students' concerns by allowing them to practice pronunciation outside of class while also providing them the opportunity to hear authentic samples of the FL.

*Notes in Spanish* <<http://www.notesinspanish.com>> is dedicated to teaching students about grammatical, lexical, and cultural issues related to the Spanish language and culture. The site contains a number of recorded conversations between a native Spanish speaker and her partner who is learning Spanish that are archived as free podcasts organized by levels of proficiency. For an additional fee, instructors can purchase grammatical and lexical exercises that correspond to each

recording. Assigning podcasts to students in the hybrid course context allows them to learn about unique cultural topics and provides them with the opportunity to improve their FL listening abilities outside of class.

The third site, *Mi Vida Loca* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/spanish/mividaloca>>, is a Web-based drama created by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 2009. It has won a number of awards for its user-friendly design and the way in which it promotes interaction between the learner, the language, and the events that make up the plot of the drama. Each episode lasts approximately 20 minutes and narrates the story of a young English-speaking woman who travels to Spain in search of her friend. Each episode contains interactive learning modules that allow learners to focus on a grammatical or lexical item used in the story, as well as an online tutor who appears on the screen when needed to answer students' questions or to help them review a concept. In sum, *Mi Vida Loca* is an engaging online resource that emphasizes comprehension of the events of a drama interwoven with grammatical, lexical, and cultural information.

The final Web site, *Linglanguage* <<http://linglanguage.com>>, allows instructors to create modules that target the four skills while also incorporating cultural content. Instructors can require students to provide a written or oral response to questions embedded in the modules and then provide students with written feedback or an audio response. It is also easy to incorporate online resources in the modules. The site allows instructors to archive and share their instructional activities with other instructors.

### *Research Questions*

In light of the research reviewed in the previous sections along with the brief description of the various technologies utilized in the three Spanish hybrid courses, this study investigates two questions: (1) How do students react to and perceive their learning in a hybrid Spanish language course and (2) what are the challenges and advantages of teaching a hybrid Spanish language course?

### *Procedures*

Surveys were distributed to 157 students enrolled in each of the three hybrid sections at the end of the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semesters (see Appendix A). Responses were obtained from 36 students in Elementary Spanish I, 34 students in Elementary Spanish II, and from 30 students in an Intensive Elementary Spanish course that covers both Elementary Spanish I and II, for a total response rate of 64%. In addition, the researcher recorded interviews with each instructor using 8 questions to guide and facilitate discussion (see Appendix B).

Two common themes emerged from the researcher's initial analysis of the transcriptions of the interviews with instructors. The first theme was advantages, encompassing comments that indicated a positive view of a hybrid Spanish language course; the second theme was challenges, classified any comment that indicated a negative or difficult aspect of teaching a hybrid Spanish language

course. A second rater was given sample statements that pertained to either the advantages or the challenges theme and then coded the instructors' responses. The researcher and rater then compared their ratings, and inter-rater reliability was determined to be 98%. The remaining discrepancies were discussed, and both the rater and the researcher reached 100% agreement on the coding of the instructors' responses.

## **Results**

### *Time, Effort, and Effect on Learning*

The student surveys included a number of questions intended to measure students' perceptions of and reactions to the hybrid course format. The surveys also contained questions that determined how much time students devoted to their work, if they believed they learned more when compared to a traditional FL course, and what they felt were the benefits and challenges of learning Spanish via the hybrid model. The majority of students in Elementary Spanish I and II responded that they spent three to four hours outside of class working on course-related assignments and projects; and in the Intensive Elementary Spanish course, the equivalent of both Elementary Spanish I and II, the majority response was evenly split between three to four hours and four to five hours (see Appendix C). Seventy-eight percent of students in the Elementary Spanish I course, 94% of students in the Elementary Spanish II course, and 93% of students in the Intensive Elementary Spanish course indicated that they either learned as much or more in their hybrid course when compared to a traditional, face-to-face course.

Question four asked students if the online exercises and supplemental Web-based activities enhanced their learning of the material. Between 38% and 50% of students reported that learning was somewhat enhanced. These results are troubling given that the exercises are central to the hybrid format.

Seventy percent of students in both the Elementary Spanish I and II courses and 67% of students in the Intensive Elementary course indicated that the hybrid format helped or somewhat helped their learning of Spanish, while approximately one-third of students in each course indicated that the hybrid format did not help their learning. In response to an open-ended follow-up question, students commented that the hybrid format was beneficial because it catered to their own ability and way of learning the material, providing information in a different way and allowing them more flexibility. They stated that the online exercises forced them to study and focus more on the material when they were not in class; and as a result, they were more motivated and engaged on those days when they did attend class.

On the other hand, students also described negative effects of the hybrid format. Because the online workbook did not provide correct answers, students felt they could not learn from their mistakes. They commented that in the hybrid format they could not ask questions of the instructor about an assignment. They

felt more engaged with the material in a classroom setting than with a computer, and they wanted an explanation of new material in class before being required to complete assignments.

When asked if they would prefer to take a hybrid course or a traditional, face-to-face course, responses show a clear preference for the hybrid format among respondents across all three courses. Fifty-six percent of students in the Elementary Spanish I course, 71% in the Elementary Spanish II course, and 63% in the Intensive Spanish course indicated that they would not opt to take a traditional course over a hybrid course in the future. Those students who preferred the traditional classroom format indicated that there was less interaction between the instructor and students in hybrid courses, that the software did not show them the correct answers to assignments, and that they experienced problems with the software. On the positive side, students who indicated a preference for future hybrid courses noted the ability to work from home rather than commute to class and the flexibility in how to learn the material.

When asked whether they would consider taking another hybrid Spanish language course in the future, 58% of students in the Elementary Spanish I, 79% of students in the Elementary Spanish II, and 40% of students in the Intensive Spanish course reported that they would enroll in another hybrid Spanish course in the future (see Appendix D). Only 12 students indicated that they would not take another Spanish hybrid course. This finding is significant as it suggests that students' experience in their FL hybrid courses was positive overall.

Given the fact that the hybrid learning format relies heavily on work completed via computer outside of the classroom, the researcher also wanted to see if technical difficulties presented problems for students. The majority of students in all courses indicated that they either encountered few or no problems that affected their ability to complete the online assignments in their course (see Appendix E). Students who did report problems repeated previous comments about the lack of immediate feedback and correct answers to assignments, unclear directions related to the software that accompanied the textbook used in the courses, and the fact that their answers frequently were scored as incorrect for minor errors, such as a missing accent mark. There were also some problems with the quality of audio exercises.

### *Instructors' Feedback*

To answer the second research question about the challenges and advantages of teaching a hybrid Spanish language course, the researcher interviewed each instructor. Given the fact that hybrid courses rely heavily on the use of technology, the instructors were asked about their familiarity and comfort level with technology in general, and they were asked to describe the types of technology that they use on a regular basis. All three instructors indicated that they were familiar with various kinds of technology and used them daily. However, one instructor indicated that at times she felt uncomfortable with using technology, but that the hybrid experience increased her familiarity with it. She reported that

she tried to incorporate various Web-based activities in both her traditional and hybrid language courses but that she rarely had enough time to adequately develop her own technology-oriented materials.

When asked about the challenges of teaching a hybrid Spanish language course, one instructor said that students in the hybrid sections who required more conversational practice might not have benefitted as much from the hybrid format as those who were more orally proficient. He went on to say that he felt that it was the instructor's responsibility to compensate for that possible imbalance between course formats by providing more speaking opportunities in the hybrid class. He concluded by stating that students in the hybrid course ultimately have more responsibility for their learning outside of the class and must be self-disciplined in order to be successful. Another instructor indicated that while the technology-based activities provide a number of opportunities for students to improve their grammatical knowledge of the FL, Web-based activities and online grammar explanations are not a substitute for teaching grammar. He often felt the need to explain the grammar concept, drill the students, and then do communicative activities, just as in a regular course. He felt that some of the software issues, such as the lack of feedback and the limited number of attempts, presented problems for students and hampered motivation for students in his sections. The third instructor indicated that students were not prepared to learn the material on their own and that they were accustomed to a more traditional approach to teaching grammar. She also commented that given the large amount of material to teach in such a short timeframe, she had little time to provide feedback for students' writing development. She also described the challenges of grading the numerous recordings and written exercises.

When asked if anything would help to make teaching a hybrid FL course any easier, the instructors said that having a graduate student teaching assistant with whom students could consult outside of class would help those students struggling with specific grammatical or lexical issues and that a graduate assistant could help instructors manage students' online work and provide feedback more efficiently.

The instructors were asked about the positive aspects or benefits of teaching a hybrid Spanish language course. They commented that by placing more of the burden of learning on students, they were more responsible, better prepared for in-class meetings, and more involved in group activities and that they took advantage of opportunities for conversational practice. In addition, the Web-based activities and resources expose students to a variety of texts and cultural information. Finally, the instructors were asked whether they noticed any difference between students in the hybrid and traditional sections of the courses that they taught over the course of the 2009-2010 academic year. All agreed that they did not notice any differences in student performance or course grades.

## **Discussion**

The primary goals of this study were to understand how students and instructors react to and perceive their roles and responsibilities in the context of a

hybrid Spanish language course and to understand the benefits and challenges of a hybrid model of learning and teaching in a FL context. Responses by students and instructors indicate their frustration when technological applications did not work as planned and did not provide feedback to assignments. These technological issues need to be addressed and evaluated to ensure that the technology is adequate for the needs of the course. Other than the negative reactions to the online workbook, the majority of students and instructors indicated that the other forms of technology facilitated their learning and teaching of the FL. However, analyses of the instructors' responses indicated that instructors can feel overwhelmed if they are not provided adequate training, time, or resources, such as a graduate student teaching assistant, to help them provide the necessary feedback to students.

Responses also indicate that the hybrid format is best suited for students who are self-motivated learners willing to take responsibility for their learning. Both students and instructors indicated that the hybrid format pushes students to study in preparation for in-class time. As a result, students enrolled in hybrid courses may be more focused on the days when they meet in class with their instructor and fellow classmates. The data presented here suggest that the hybrid format promotes more interaction among all interlocutors in the classroom versus a traditional FL course. While this particular finding needs to be further investigated, it does appear to be a positive benefit based on what students and instructors indicate in this study.

The majority of students believed that they learned as much or more Spanish in a hybrid course than a traditional Spanish course. Additionally, a majority of the 100 students who filled out the survey indicated that they would prefer to take a hybrid Spanish language course in the future. Instructors observed little to no difference in students' performance between the hybrid and traditional sections of the courses that they taught each semester. While a number of other factors would need to be considered before concluding that there were no differences in the gains in oral and written proficiency between students in the hybrid section and those in the traditional sections of the three Spanish courses involved in this study, it is interesting to note that the data presented here appear to mirror findings regarding linguistic gains and differences (Adair-Hauck et al., 2000; Blake, Wilson, Cetto, & Pardo-Ballester, 2008; Chenoweth, Ushida, & Murday, 2006; Young, 2008).

As more FL programs in the U.S. offer hybrid courses, a number of steps must be taken. The FL program must provide the necessary funds to adequately train instructors and graduate student teaching assistants in the various kinds of technologies necessary for a hybrid course. Before implementing hybrid courses, the program or institution must understand what technologies are currently in place, address any weaknesses, and gradually explore and implement new technologies to provide for a smooth transition for both student and instructor. Adequate time and funding are necessary so that robust assessment tools and measures can be put in place to determine the linguistic effects of the hybrid format on students' ongoing FL development. As the number of hybrid and online FL

courses in the U.S. continues to increase, additional research and feedback from students and instructors will help to shape and strengthen FL hybrid programs at the post-secondary level. It is hoped that this current study sheds some light on the various pedagogical and curricular issues that make up hybrid FL courses.

As with any study, there are a number of limitations. To begin, the researcher in this study was the supervisor of the three participant instructors. Therefore, it is possible that the instructors may not have been completely forthright with him due to his position in the program. However, their reactions to and perceptions of the benefits and challenges of teaching a hybrid Spanish language course are still insightful and help to understand how they perceive both their roles and responsibilities in the blended format.

This study was limited to one hybrid project at one southern university over one academic year. It explored how students and instructors responded to the hybrid course format in this particular context. Given the fact that no additional measures, such as students' GPAs or gains in students' oral and written abilities, were correlated with individual responses on the surveys, conclusions related to the comparative effects of the hybrid format on students' linguistic development cannot be addressed and remain outside the scope of this study.

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## Appendix A Student Survey

Course: SPAN \_\_\_\_\_ Section #: \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Spanish Hybrid Course Evaluation

**Instructions:** This anonymous evaluation is intended to provide the Spanish department with feedback regarding the hybrid course in which you are currently enrolled. Your honesty and thoroughness when answering the questions are valuable to us.

**NOTE:** Another course evaluation (i.e., one that evaluates the instructor) will also be made available to you (if you haven't already filled one out). This evaluation is intended to evaluate the hybrid nature of the Spanish course and not your Instructor.

1. What is your cumulative GPA? \_\_\_\_\_
2. On average, how many hours outside of class each week did you work on Spanish (check only one)?  
 0-3 hours     3-4 hours     4-5 hours     5-6 hours     7 or more hours
3. When compared to a 'regular'/non-hybrid course, do you think you learned:  
 not as much as a regular course     just as much as a regular course  
 more than a regular course
4. In your opinion, do the online exercises enhance your learning of the material?  
 Yes                       Somewhat                       No
- 5a. Do you feel the substitution of one class with online assignments is helpful to your learning?     Yes                       Somewhat                       No  
 Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5b. Would you rather have 4 days of class with slightly less online work?  
 Yes                       No  
 Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_
6. To what degree have you had technical difficulties that interfered with the completion of your assignments?  
 Too many     Many     Some     Not many     None

If you've had technical difficulties with the online content that accompanies the *Temas* textbook, please briefly explain the nature of the problems/your frustrations: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Did you experience technical difficulties in a computer lab on campus or at home/other computers when doing your Spanish homework? Please mark only ONE:

Computer lab on campus (which one? \_\_\_\_\_)  Home/other computers  
 Both

8. Would you consider taking another Spanish language hybrid course in the future given your experience this semester?

Yes  No  Maybe

Thank you for taking time to do this survey. Please return this to your instructor.

## Appendix B

### Instructor Interview Guide

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you been teaching Spanish (here at this university and elsewhere)?
3. How many semesters have you taught a hybrid course (including this semester)?
4. Describe your familiarity/comfort level with using various kinds of technology (both for professional and personal use). For example, what kinds of technologies/software/social networking sites do you use on a regular basis (e.g., Facebook, iChats, writing your own Blog, listening to podcasts, emailing, watching videos online, etc.)?
- 5a. From your (i.e., instructor) perspective, what have been/are the challenges of teaching a hybrid Spanish language course?
- 5b. What would (if anything) help to address the challenges that you mentioned in the previous question?
- 5c. Is there anything that you would need/like to have that would help make teaching a hybrid course any easier?
6. From your (i.e., instructor) perspective, what have been/are the positive aspects or benefits of teaching a hybrid Spanish language course?
7. Since you are teaching a regular and hybrid section of the same course this semester, do you see/notice any difference between students in the two sections with respect to performance on quizzes, exams, orals, etc.?
8. Would you like add any other comment?

**Appendix C****Average amounts of time dedicated to Spanish coursework outside of class**

<b>Elem. Spanish I</b>	<b>Elem. Spanish II</b>	<b>Intensive Elem. Spanish</b>
0-3 hours = 6/36 (16%)	0-3 hours = 11/34 (32%)	0-3 hours = 4/30 (13%)
3-4 hours = 14/36 (39%)	3-4 hours = 13/34 (38%)	3-4 hours = 9/30 (30%)
4-5 hours = 11/36 (31%)	4-5 hours = 9/34 (27%)	4-5 hours = 9/30 (30%)
5-6 hours = 3/36 (8%)	5-6 hours = 1/34 (3%)	5-6 hours = 6/30 (20%)
7+ hours = 2/36 (6%)	7+ hours = 0/34 (0%)	7+ hours = 2/30 (7%)

**Appendix D****Opinions about whether students would consider taking another hybrid Spanish course**

<b>Elem. Spanish I</b>	<b>Elem. Spanish II</b>	<b>Intensive Elem. Spanish</b>
Yes = 21/36 (58%)	Yes = 27/34 (79%)	Yes = 12/30 (40%)
Maybe = 9/36 (25%)	Maybe = 5.34 (15%)	Maybe = 14/30 (47%)
No = 6/36 (17%)	No = 2/34 (6%)	No = 4/30 (13%)

**Appendix E****Opinions about amount of technical difficulties interfering with completion of assignments**

<b>Elem. Spanish I</b>	<b>Elem. Spanish II</b>	<b>Intensive Elem. Spanish</b>
Too many = 4/36 (11%)	Too many = 0/34 (0%)	Too many = 2/30 (6%)
Many = 2/36 (5%)	Many = 4/34 (11%)	Many = 6/30 (20%)
Some = 10/36 (28%)	Some = 9/34 (27%)	Some = 9/30 (30%)
Not many = 11/36 (31%)	Not many = 9/34 (27%)	Not many = 8/30 (27%)
None = 9/36 (25%)	None = 12/34 (35%)	None = 5/30 (17%)

# 4

## Perceptions of the Culture and Communications Standards

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### **Abstract**

*This article discusses the impact of the Standards for Foreign Language Teaching in the 21st Century on language programs at American universities. Surveys were administered to American students and to faculty at a university in Spain asking questions about the five goal areas of the standards. Responses from these groups were analyzed and compared with responses of faculty at American institutions. Although most faculty informants in the U.S. and in Spain said they were familiar with the goals of the standards, findings indicate that grammatical accuracy is perceived to be the primary focus of language programs in the U.S. Faculty in the U.S. reported that they felt underprepared to teach culture and communication skills and unsure of the role of linguistics in the development of students' language proficiency.*

### **Background**

Now in its third edition, the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* has served as a guide for the profession for more than 15 years (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006). Although the standards were originally developed for P-12 educators, the list of endorsements and contributors includes state, regional, and national language organization, as well as classroom teachers and post-secondary faculty across the P-16 spectrum; and many colleges and universities embed the standards in their programs of study. The process of developing and implementing these national standards guided the profession as the teaching paradigm shifted away from a focus on form (DeMado, 1993; Shrum & Glisan, 2005, pp. 67-69) and educators transitioned from thinking of language learning in terms of “how (grammar) and what (vocabulary)” to “knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom” (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006, p.11). The interrelated nature of the five goals—communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities, known collectively as the 5Cs, encourages the integration of different modes of

communication with culture as learners develop both linguistic and cultural proficiency. Collectively, the standards emphasize the importance of learners' engagement with the language of study, requiring that students participate in conversations; provide, obtain, present, and interpret information; express feelings; exchange opinions; demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between cultural products, practices, and perspectives; use the language to acquire information; demonstrate understanding of concepts of culture and language; and show evidence of language use beyond the classroom (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006, p. 9). It has become common practice for textbook writers to include references to the standards, thereby drawing attention to the five goal areas and emphasizing their importance in language teaching and language learning.

Prior to the publication of the standards, Horwitz (1988) found that beginning language students believed that the most important part of acquiring proficiency in another language was learning grammar and vocabulary. More than 20 years later, while it may appear that the profession is guided by the integrated goals of the standards, there is evidence that grammar still is perceived to be the most important element in language teaching. When Brown (2009) compared student and teacher beliefs about effective language teaching, the greatest statistical difference related to the teaching of grammar. University students enrolled in elementary- and intermediate-level language courses believed that effective foreign language teachers should use activities to practice grammar points rather than to exchange information. Brown posits that student interest in grammar may result from a discrepancy between the way students are taught and the way they are tested, and Cheatham (2008) calls for a change in instructional content and testing strategies. In other words, although teachers may believe that classrooms should be communicative, they may test students for grammatical accuracy. Moreover, Wilbur (2007) reminds the profession that knowledge about the standards does not guarantee that teachers understand how to integrate the standards into curriculum planning, instruction, and assessment; and integrating the standards into instruction and assessment may not guarantee that students recognize or value the goals.

The role of culture in language acquisition is also a perennial question. In the Foreword to Seelye's (1991) *Teaching culture*, Morain reports that in 1971 ACTFL offered its first pre-conference workshop devoted to the teaching of culture. Four decades later at the 2008 ACTFL conference, attendees heard about ongoing work on a cultural proficiency exam. However, despite this remarkable progress, cultural proficiency is not universally perceived to be an important part of language acquisition. In a recent study by Brown (2009), college students rated cultural knowledge significantly lower in importance than did their instructors; and Wilkerson (2006) found that college faculty perceived the study of culture as tangential to language learning. Met (2008) stated that only 30% of teachers feel prepared to teach culture, and she told of frequent discrepancies between teachers' self-perceptions of what they teach and the true definition of culture. She noted that what is taught as culture is often superficial rather than integrated and

interrelated, and culture is taught in ways that do not relate practices, products, and perspectives as described in the standards.

The authors of this article have backgrounds in language teaching and teacher education. On several occasions we have been asked how our teaching has evolved over time in light of the standards. It was during one of those discussions that we decided to investigate the impact of the standards beyond our own personal experiences and beyond our own classrooms. We planned to poll American university students and ask about their experiences with the standards. We selected students who had completed some language course work in the U.S. and were using their language proficiency while abroad. We compared their responses with those of faculty outside the U.S. who were teaching them, and we triangulated our findings by interviewing teachers and college faculty in the U.S. Our goal was to use the findings from our study to inform our own teaching and to share with the profession our insight into the role of the standards in language teaching in the U.S.

### **Methodology**

During the summer of 2007, we led 36 students from 13 different American post-secondary institutions on a 6-week study abroad experience to Spain. All students were required to live with host families and to enroll in art, culture, grammar, history, or literature courses taught by native Spaniards at the local university. We also required that two graduate students participate in seminars that we facilitated on special topics in foreign language methodology.

We designed a questionnaire for the Spanish faculty asking about American students' strengths and weaknesses in the areas addressed by the standards (see Appendix A). The survey was distributed and collected by administrators from the university. We designed a separate survey for our students. In the student survey we briefly described the standards and asked what the students learned while in Spain (see Appendix B) and what American university faculty could do to better prepare students in each area. Comparisons of the findings from the faculty and student questionnaires would help us understand how well the standards were integrated into programs of study in the U.S. and offer insight into needed areas of improvement.

Students returned their surveys to us immediately, and we were able to conduct follow-up interviews to confirm our findings. The faculty surveys were returned to the university administrators and forwarded to us several months after we left the country. Aware of the need to verify our emerging findings but unable to contact the respondents, we decided to ask language faculty at American institutions to serve as reviewers. The discussion during the first meeting was so insightful that we continued to ask language faculty to review and verify findings at multiple points during the preparation of this manuscript. The contributions of the reviewers in the U.S. and their candid comments have enriched our understanding of contemporary teaching practices and the role of the standards.

## **Comparison of Responses from Spanish Faculty and American Students**

Eleven Spanish university faculty members responded to our survey. They had an average of 14.5 years experience teaching Spanish as a foreign or a second language with a range of between 8 and 20 years. The majority (82%) reported that they were familiar with the five principal concepts of the standards (n=9 yes, n=2 no) and that their university had similar goals (n=9 yes, n= 2 no). At the end of the 6-week study-abroad experience, the students were given a similar survey (see Appendix B). Among the students, 10 (28%) said that they were familiar with the standards and 26 (72%) said that they were not. When asked whether their institutions used the 5Cs, 17 students (47%) said yes, 12 students (33%) said no, and 7 students (19%) did not respond or said that they did not know. Our original intent was to compare responses of Spanish faculty with those of students and study similarities and differences. However, we quickly noted that most differences related to only two topics: grammar and culture.

### *Communication and Grammar*

When asked to describe any weaknesses they noticed in American students' speaking and writing abilities (Standard 1: Communication), seven of the Spanish faculty listed developmental issues normally overcome by time and experience, such as pronunciation problems, a tendency to translate literally, limited vocabulary, and a lack of oral practice. Four respondents commented that students had excessive preparation in grammar, that they were unfamiliar with conversational and textual cues, and that they were unable to comprehend colloquial or informal discourse. In essence, students were perceived to know more about grammar rules than about how to communicate in Spanish.

When students were asked how the study abroad experience enhanced their ability to communicate in the presentational, interpretive, and interpersonal modes (Standard 1), their most frequent answers were (1) through practice speaking with Spaniards, (2) by acquiring new vocabulary, and (3) by studying grammar. When asked about areas of communication for which they still felt under prepared, students responded that they were not confident initiating conversations and that they were concerned about their grammatical accuracy. It is noteworthy that grammar and vocabulary featured prominently in responses in every category. Later in the survey, students were asked to describe what they learned about their own language by studying in Spain. In their comments, students described themselves as "ignorant" of English grammar. They equated their inability to recite English grammar rules with ignorance of English grammar, and, likewise their ability to state Spanish grammar rules with knowing Spanish.

### *Culture*

Spanish faculty were asked to comment on students' ability to make connections between the relationship between cultures and languages. They

responded that students made more cultural comparisons than they made grammatical comparisons, and student answers bear out this finding. When asked what they learned about their own language and culture by studying Spanish, students described negative aspects of American culture—Americans are stingy, picky eaters, uptight, conservative, focused on money, and workaholics.

When asked to comment on students' cultural proficiency, Spanish faculty said that American students had limited knowledge of Spanish culture, current events, and political and social situations in Spain. Faculty said that students were more familiar with Latin America than Spain and that they confused and conflated customs and cultures. Faculty also described students as behaving as if American culture were superior to other cultures. As was true in the previous section on communication and grammar, many of the perceived shortcomings can and will be overcome with time and experience. Moreover, the fact that the students were studying abroad can be taken as an indication of their commitment to learn more about other cultures. Indeed, 86% of students reported that they learned a lot about Spain's culture, geography, and politics, noting that not all Spaniards support bull fighting, that Spain has a royal family, and that Spain has a rich history of art and architecture.

Most students' comments about Spanish cultural products and practices focused on food and beverages, such as non-refrigerated milk and eggs, differences in hours for meals, and consumption of alcohol. However, student responses about Spaniards' ways of thinking, perspectives, and world view were very broad. When asked to comment specifically on what they learned about other world views, 72% of students responded saying that Americans are spoiled and egocentric, that Spaniards are uninhibited, and that both nations have similar problems. Students described Spaniards as more generous and passionate than Americans. They noted that Spaniards spent more time with their families than did Americans, they had more balance in their work and family responsibilities, and they were more open-minded than Americans. These comments show insight and the ability of students to observe behaviors and draw conclusions.

### *Faculty and Student Recommendations*

When Spanish faculty were asked how professors in the U.S. could better prepare students for their travel to Spain, their suggestions were evenly divided between a need for greater cultural awareness and a need to teach communication skills rather than grammar. The same recommendations were made in student responses when asked how university faculty could prepare students in the standards. Nineteen of the student comments mirrored the responses by Spanish faculty, with 4 suggestions that faculty teach more culture and 9 requests that faculty teach grammar in more communicative ways, including speaking only in Spanish and using discussion of topics of interest to students rather than worksheets. Once again, comments on culture and grammar dominated the responses. The remaining comments requested that professors explain the standards, a trend also noted by Cheatham (2008), who described post-secondary instruction as isolated from the standards.

## Discussion of the Findings

As we described earlier, we discussed our emerging findings with language teachers in the U.S. When we met with these reviewers, we began by asking them to complete the faculty questionnaire as they thought the Spanish university faculty had responded so that we could discuss perceptions and then realities. We then discussed their answers before we shared our emerging findings. Our most important discoveries occurred when we asked reviewers to imagine what they believed Spaniards felt were problems in written and oral communication. In every instance, reviewers listed discrete points of grammar: verb conjugations, noun-adjective agreement, accent marks, word order, pronouns, and prepositions. Reviewers were surprised that the Spanish faculty listed none of these problems and instead reported that grammar was overemphasized. When we told reviewers that student responses confirmed Spaniards' statements, reviewers countered that the textbooks they were obliged to follow were grammar-focused. They said they were unsure of how to teach interpersonal communication skills that students reported they wanted to learn, such as how to start and end a conversation.

Although reviewers accurately predicted that Spanish faculty would say that students had limited knowledge of other cultures, they did not mention a possible connection between students' shortcomings and classroom instruction and interaction. For example, when we revealed that Spanish faculty commented on the Spanish taboos against eating in class and stretching in public, several reviewers indicated that they were unaware of these prohibitions. At times reviewers appeared embarrassed as they explained that they had limited experience in a target country and knew little about Spain. When we asked how they taught culture, reviewers consistently compiled lists of isolated facts, an approach that we call *the flasher method* for the way it exposes students to random and often titillating tidbits of cultural information. Reviewers appeared to teach what was most familiar, obvious, or convenient. Although none of the reviewers or Spanish faculty mentioned relationships between products, practices, and perspectives described in the cultures standard, it should be noted that students were able to articulate a relationship between Spaniards' slower pace of life, commitment to family, and passion as well as how these practices and perspectives were integral to the Spanish world view. Based upon discussions with reviewers, we conclude there is still a lot of misunderstanding about the goals of the culture standard, and we hope that the findings from this study will show how well students notice relationships once they are immersed in the culture.

Most reviewers guessed that Spaniards saw students as self-centered and close-minded; and most Spanish faculty felt that students were ignorant of Spanish culture, politics, and current events. However, we must point out that by virtue of travelling abroad the students had made a step toward overcoming these behaviors and perceptions. Students' comments show that as a group they were attentive to Spanish culture. Students also noted that exposure to different world views and cultures showed them that Americans are not seen by everyone in a positive light. Their comments confirm that language students are interested in

expanding their horizons and that they are attentive to other world views. We hope that by pointing out these differences more faculty will address these issues with students and include these topics in lessons.

### **Implications for the Profession**

Comparisons of responses from native speakers, students, and faculty indicate that at the post-secondary level, American language programs appear to emphasize grammatical accuracy as the most important element in learning another language. Early during one discussion with reviewers, one individual commented “If (students) know the grammar, they know the language and can get around in the country.” However, as the discussion continued, reviewers began to notice the interrelated components of culture and communication in language proficiency. Given this experience, we believe that language faculty may need overt instruction on how to teach culture as part of the language-learning process rather than as a separate entity or separate course in the program of study. For example, Abrate (2000) describes the teaching of culture as helping learners see culture as a film rather than photos so that learners are empowered to observe, analyze, and make cultural hypotheses. Szewczynski (personal communication, November 11, 2009) reminds language faculty who feel underprepared to teach culture that they do not have to know everything. They can, and should, collaborate with students to be cultural learners as part of their ongoing professional development (see also Szewczynski, 1998). Altstaedter and Jones (2009) show that students’ language proficiency and motivation are enhanced through the study of culture, and Hidalgo Calle and Alley (1999) offer examples of how to teach culture in ways that prepare students to be analysts, particularly in preparation for study abroad.

We also noticed that when discussing the communication standard, reviewers talked about the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) separately rather than in integrated activities. In their feedback reviewers said they did not feel prepared to integrate interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive modes of communication and they did not have a sufficient knowledge base to teach common discourse strategies. Faculty in the U.S. feel obligated to teach a grammar-driven curriculum, and the design and layout of textbooks may unwittingly reinforce the notion that grammar is the most important component of language.

Based upon our findings and discussions, we believe that post-secondary language programs in the U.S. continue to focus on grammar rather than communication. Educators overlook the crucial role of culture in linguistic proficiency, perhaps because of their own lack of preparation in culture. As a result, the misperception of language as grammar rules is perpetuated. On the positive side, student perceptions about their cultural and linguistic proficiency change as they spend time in the target country. Misperceptions and stereotypes can be overcome, and students are able to make accurate and meaningful observations about the target culture.

## Future Research

During discussions and verification of findings with these reviewers, we noted that the faculty survey asked respondents to list student weaknesses in communication, cultures, and connections. The word *weaknesses* may have led respondents to believe that they had to describe students in negative terms, although there were multiple examples of what students could do well. None of the reviewers said anything about the wording nor asked whether we wanted only negative examples. However, we advise that the wording be changed if this study is replicated.

The students in our study were enrolled in 13 different post-secondary institutions, so the findings from this study have been generalized across all post-secondary language programs. A future project may focus on students from a single institution to determine whether the findings are similar. We are also aware of the limitations of trying to generalize from a qualitative study based on 36 Spanish students and 11 faculty respondents. Future studies might expand the number of participants or survey students about other languages of study.

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**Appendix A**

Questionnaire given to university faculty in Spain

**5 Cs Entrevista—España**

**Nombre y apellido** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fecha** \_\_\_\_\_

**Número de años que enseña Ud. español** \_\_\_\_\_

[Number of years that you have taught Spanish]

**1.** En los EEUU se basa la enseñanza de los idiomas extranjeros en cinco conceptos principales: la comunicación, las culturas, las conexiones, las comparaciones, y las comunidades.

¿Conoce usted estos conceptos?	_____ Sí	_____ No
¿Tiene su país conceptos parecidos?	_____ Sí	_____ No
¿Tiene su universidad algo similar?	_____ Sí	_____ No

[In the U.S., foreign language teaching is based on five principal concepts: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities.

Are you familiar with these concepts?	_____ Yes	_____ No
Does your country have similar concepts?	_____ Yes	_____ No
Does your university have something similar?	_____ Yes	_____ No

**2. Comunicación**—Queremos que nuestros estudiantes puedan hablar y escribir en español. ¿Qué problemas nota usted que tienen sus estudiantes en comunicar? [Communication—We want our students to be able to speak and write in Spanish. What problems do you notice that your students have when they communicate?]

**3. Cultururas**—Queremos que nuestros estudiantes entiendan la manera en que piensan y viven los españoles, o sea, sus perspectivas, sus productos, y sus tradiciones. ¿Qué fallas nota usted en la capacidad de sus estudiantes de entender a los españoles?

[Cultures—We want our students to understand the way in which Spaniards think and live, in other words, their perspectives, products, and traditions. What weaknesses do you notice in your students' ability to understand Spaniards?]

**4. Conexiones**—Queremos que nuestros estudiantes reconozcan las perspectivas únicamente españolas. ¿Qué problemas nota usted que tienen sus estudiantes en entender el punto de vista español?

[Connections—We want our students to recognize the unique Spanish perspectives. What problems do you notice that your student have in understanding the Spanish point of view?]

**5. Comparaciones**—Queremos que nuestros estudiantes comparen su propio idioma y su cultura con la lengua y cultura españolas. ¿Nota usted algunos ejemplos de tales comparaciones?

[Comparisons—We want our student to compare their own language and culture with the Spanish language and culture. Do you notice any examples of such comparisons?]

**6. Comunidades**—Queremos que nuestros estudiantes usen el idioma extranjero fuera del aula de clase y para propósitos no-académicos, o sea, para divertirse, leer, et cétera. ¿Ha notado usted casos en que sus estudiantes empleen el idioma fuera del salón de clase?

[Communities—We want our student to use the language outside the classroom for non-academic purposes such as for enjoyment, reading, etc. Have you noticed students using the language outside of the classroom?]

**7.** ¿Qué aconsejaría usted a los profesores para mejor preparar a los estudiantes antes de viajar a España?

[What advice would you give professors to better prepare students before they travel to Spain?]

## Appendix B

### Student Survey on Standards

#### Feedback on Study Abroad Program in Spain

I give my permission to use my feedback in a research project to improve study abroad programs. My answers will not affect my grade.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**1. In the United States** there are standards for foreign language learning, called the 5Cs: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. \*Are you familiar with these standards? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

\*Does your school \_\_\_\_\_ use the 5 Cs? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  
[name]

**2. Communication:** Presentational, interpretive, and interpersonal skills

\*What did you learn on this trip that helped your speaking and writing skills?

\*What did you learn on this trip that strengthened your listening and reading skills?

\*In what areas of communication do you *still* feel under prepared? What will you do to improve?

**3. Culture:** Products, practices, and perspectives of other cultures.

\*What did you learn about the way that Spaniards think, their *perspectives* of life, and their world view?

\*What did you learn about the *practices* of Spain, the traditions and rituals?

\*What did you learn about the *products* of Spain used in daily life?

**4. Connections** with other disciplines

\*Other than Spanish grammar, what did you learn about other subjects, such as politics, geography, math, etc.?

\*What did you learn about other “world views”?

**5. Comparisons of language and culture**

\*What did you learn about *your own language and culture* by studying Spanish?

**6. Communities:** language outside the classroom

\*How will you continue to use Spanish *outside of school* for personal enjoyment and enrichment?

**7. ADVICE:** What advice would you give to *professors* to prepare students in the 5Cs?



# 5

## **Service Learning and Foreign Language Acquisition: Working with the Migrant Community**

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Language learning within the context of service-learning presents a unique opportunity for students, educators, and community members alike. While there are numerous definitions of service-learning, the National and Community Services Act of 1990 defines service-learning with a set of four criteria, basic to most service-learning endeavors:

- learning and development through active participation in thoughtfully organized community-service oriented experiences
- a structured experience integrated into the academic curriculum
- an opportunity to apply knowledge and acquired skills in real-life situations
- a sense of caring for others

Most service-learning projects focus on the development of a more civic-minded student whose increased knowledge of democratic values through the service-learning experience benefits the community and society at large (Vadeboncoeur, Rahm, Aguilera, & LeCompte, 1996). Service-learning projects focus on issues such as homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, hunger, teen pregnancy, voter apathy, media literacy, and unemployment (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Maybach 1996). Service-learning projects may be included in programs from kindergarten to post-secondary institutions. The ideas behind service-learning are not new to education. John Dewey, the father of modern education, endorsed the idea that, in order to develop intellectual capacity and critical thinking skills, learning experiences must be authentic and not divorced from the world outside the class (Dewey, 1997). More than 1105 college campuses, high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools are now actively involved in service-learning and campus-community out-reach programs (Cohen & Kinsey, 1992).

Because many school systems have service learning requirements (Markus et al., 1993), service-learning in support of migrant and immigrant communities can provide a national outlet for foreign language students in the United States. The outcomes of service-learning mesh well with the educational guide-

lines set forth by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language, the American Association of Teachers of French, the American Association of Teachers of German, and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, as part of a national collaborative effort to develop high standards for language learning. The guidelines fall into five categories: communication, cultures, communities, connections, and comparisons (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996).

As the focus on a communicative-based approach to language acquisition in the classroom grows, it becomes increasingly apparent that real life exchanges with L1 (native) speakers eventually need to be a part of the language learning experience. The value in the shift in the classroom from a focus primarily about language and structure to the ability to use a foreign language competently in speaking and listening, reading, and writing has been clearly documented and implemented in a variety of ways (Omaggio, 1993; Tschirner, 1996). Students feel frustrated, however, when after one to three years of foreign language study, they are often unable to communicate to or understand the local L1 speakers. The service-learning component offers an opportunity for dialogue with native speakers whose spoken Spanish differs greatly from classroom tapes but who are more representative of people with whom students might work should they chose to work in the United States and use Spanish in their professions.<sup>1</sup>

Cultures and communities are clearly addressed through service-learning. Students directly experience a variety of traditions, customs, and dialects, particularly those of Central America and Mexico while working in the community. The diversity within Hispanic communities also becomes apparent as students begin to understand cultural subtleties such as whether the family is from a rural or urban background and whether or not Spanish is their first language. By venturing out into the community, students see beyond invisible walls which often divide neighborhoods. Having become more familiar with the Hispanic community at home, service-learning students are also more willing to study abroad as the desire to communicate with newly discovered friends provides incentive for them to become fluent. Connections are made between economics, anthropology, history, political science, and other disciplines as students see the actual effects for example, of the North American Free Trade Agreement, on specific individuals.

Many universities have developed specific guidelines for general education outcomes, which often include a demonstration of cross-cultural perspectives and knowledge of other societies, a demonstrated knowledge of principles of ethics, and their employment in the analysis and resolution of moral problems. These national, state, and local mandates challenge foreign language educators to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their language proficiency outside the classroom. This paper will focus specifically on the integration of a service-learning component into an intermediate-level Spanish grammar and conversation class and the possibilities service-learning offers the foreign language educator in general.

## The Service-learning Project

This project took place in a largely agricultural region. During summer months over 24,000 migrant workers and their families take up residence to work with tobacco, cotton, and other crops. Many families eventually stay as labor needs are often year-round. There are many Hispanic migrant/immigrant families that speak little or no English. Similarly, there are a few native English speakers of Spanish. Educators, health professionals, farmers, and many area business people look to the academic community for help.

In the summer of 1997 an intermediate Spanish class attended a local mass in Spanish. This experience was part of class assignment in which students learn about culture through observation of traditional Hispanic customs. The professor, who had been translating for a local domestic shelter, brought along a young pregnant mother, who worked as a migrant worker, and her many children as a break from the domestic shelter where they were staying. Students were far more interested in her and her children than in the church service. Next week in class, students wanted to know more. Where she was from? What was she going to do? What were her options? These questions started an ongoing discussion on culture, migrant workers, US-Latino relations, cross-cultural family values, and relationships that continue to this day. As a result of the class's interest, three students volunteered at the domestic violence shelter; others offered to look for housing for the young woman; and once housing was found, others helped clean and prepare the residence. Students expressed interest in incorporating these kinds of activities into a Spanish class, and a service-learning component was added to the fall term syllabus for the Spanish Composition and Conversation class. A smaller scale version of service-learning was added to the Introduction to Spanish class.<sup>2</sup> From the program's inception, students have been actively involved in defining goals and objectives and in assessing outcomes. This collaborative effort, a goal of service-learning, provides for equal opportunity in articulating needs and goals (Mintz, 1996). In preparation for the service-learning project, students were asked to determine where the Hispanic population resides and where their centers of business are.

Preparation for these classes was new territory, as research regarding service-learning with a foreign language class is virtually non-existent. Once the need within the community was identified, it was necessary to determine whether or not students could successfully fill that need and to determine the length and intensity of the project required, as suggested by Cohen (1994). The needs in this region were basically those of translation services for agencies and families, tutoring and mentoring services for children, especially those unable to speak English in the school system, and work as translators for community educators in the health services. In a survey of those agencies already working with the migrant families, several agencies expressed a desire for student help on a quarterly basis. These agencies included the Department of Human Resources, two Hispanic churches, and the local Migrant Education Agency, which functions under the auspices of

the National Migrant Education Program. With the help of these agencies, three families were designated with whom students could work. Students who chose not to participate were provided with an alternate activity.

Three objectives for the foreign language class with a service-learning component included developing grammar skills, building speaking and listening skills, and increasing cultural awareness. In this project, the first objective, to introduce them to as many advanced grammar concepts as possible and increase their vocabulary while improving their writing skills, was achieved with an appropriate grammar text, a journal written in Spanish documenting their service-learning experience, and a final paper, also written in Spanish, evaluating the service-learning experience, in terms of language acquisition, personal development, and benefit to the community. The second, improving their speaking and listening skills, and the third, to increase in and their understanding of Hispanic culture, were accomplished through the service-learning experience and by means of class visitors from the Hispanic community. The discussion on community needs and the comprehension of cultural similarities and differences with the Hispanic community continued throughout the school term. Weekly guest speakers from various community agencies presented, in the target language, their perspective and their history of working with the Hispanic peoples in the county. Students were exposed to a variety of institutions and individuals using Spanish in their professions.<sup>3</sup> Visitors also allowed students to hear and interact with a variety of dialects and idiomatic expressions. Students were prepared before each visit through a discussion of the agency and/or country associated with each visitor, and they were required to prepare two pertinent questions for each visitor. Students were evaluated on each visitor by means of open-ended exam questions.

Before beginning the service-learning experience, students signed a liability waiver and were required to participate in a multi-cultural conference dealing with migrant children. Students learned about cultural stereotypes regarding migrant workers, important factual cultural differences, and especially about how to work with Hispanic migrant families and children. Cultural aspects such as eye contact, personal space, tone-of-voice, and family matters became an integral part of the courses. (See Appendix A.) Students participated in several games in which different cultural characteristics were practiced. This activity was especially helpful as students, before they went out in the field, were able to discuss how difficult it was, for example, to talk with someone while his or her eyes were lowered. Later, while in the field, students served as cultural liaisons, explaining to perplexed teachers that looking teachers straight in the eye is disrespectful in some Hispanic communities. Selected readings provided background information and a basis for class discussion. In conjunction with class discussions of cultural characteristics specific to the Mexican American Migrant community, students also analyzed Kohlberg's "Iceberg Conception of the Nature of Culture," (Kohlberg, 1981).

Preliminary fieldwork took about three weeks. Arranging schedules for university students, migrant families, and primary and secondary school teachers is a very time-consuming endeavor because of the variety of individual commitments involved. Equally important were the workshops about culturally sensitive

issues with respect to time, commitment, and responsibility. Whereas students can choose not to come to class, choosing not to show up when a migrant family is waiting implies a lack of respect which could negatively affect the program (Mintz & Hesser, 1995). In general the Hispanic migrant community tends to be suspicious of the motives others have when working with them and are reluctant to open up to strangers. Students working with adolescents in the junior high found this information especially helpful when those they were mentoring responded with monosyllabic answers for the first two weeks of the project.

After preliminary fieldwork, initial site visits included the agency worker, the professor, the students, and the families and children they would be mentoring. The site preparation was helpful to all parties; the families felt reassured that this was a serious and honest effort to help educate their children; students felt they were treated in a professional manner. The professor and the agency worker served to facilitate conversation as students were very hesitant to speak initially, and the migrant children and families were also reticent about communicating. This uncertainty on the part of the student about actually speaking in Spanish to a native speaker was one of the biggest obstacles faced at the inception of the program. Students set up either two 30-minute visits or a one-hour visit each week. Institutions were less flexible than families regarding visits, and both required strict guidelines, such as dress codes in the schools and specific and limited hours of visitation with the migrant families. Students who worked with families worked in groups of two to three for safety reasons because the neighborhoods were often classified as “less-than-desirable.” Students learned, however, that neighborhoods are often labeled as such based on fear and ignorance of others. Gender divisions were strictly enforced; that is, males worked with male children and females worked with female children, both to comply with cultural norms and to avoid any possibility of sexual harassment issues. As in study abroad and other programs, this program is not and cannot be risk-free.<sup>4</sup> Although the goals for each project varied, for the most part, the university students were asked to translate, interpret, and mentor. University students constantly were required to make use of their knowledge of Spanish and in so doing accomplished an important course goal. The Hispanic migrant community also benefited in improved English and comprehension skills, higher grades, and greater familiarity with the community at large.

### **Language Skills**

Many students, however, were able to apply the linguistic skills learned in class to their fieldwork. Most student groups formed an internal hierarchy based on speaking ability; those most fluent talked most during the initial visits; those less fluent did as the more fluent students advised them to do. With time, however, all students participated during all visits. Some reported that even though they felt that their spoken Spanish had not improved to the extent they had hoped, what did improve was their attitude towards speaking Spanish outside the class.

“This project reminded me of why I had decided to learn Spanish. . . . I began to look for opportunities to use my Spanish, and I don’t feel frustrated when customers come to the restaurant [where I work] and they don’t know English.” The students in general no longer felt shy or awkward speaking Spanish to strangers. That students were no longer timid regarding speaking Spanish was an extremely important accomplishment, because one of the most frequent impediments language learners face is anxiety of failure or fear of appearing foolish. “When I read the class syllabus, I thought I would die. I didn’t think I could speak with a person who couldn’t speak English,” said one student in her course evaluation.

In their final papers, students wrote about the problems understanding slang, dialects, and unfamiliar vocabulary. Dictionary usage greatly increased, especially as related to the vocabulary need in the region, such as picking cotton, cropping tobacco, and spraying pesticide. Those working in educational settings practiced their commands as they gave instructions to the young students. Circumlocution was mutually beneficial to students and their community counterparts. The applicability of lessons learned in the class exercises was magnified as students worked and translated in real-life settings. One student was caught off-guard as she had forgotten her dictionary and was asked to translate the word ‘head-lice’ (a common problem in the area) and explain why the young student was being sent home. Phonetics came into play as students taught English: “Now I understand more about why we learn about vowels and syllables. I had to write down the words with Spanish sounds, using the Spanish “e” wherever an English “a” sound was needed.” Students taking education courses also got to practice various teaching methodologies in order to facilitate the tutoring process.

Limitations of the service-learning project included the fact that several students improved linguistically only after repeated encouragement. Students who worked with children in the school system felt they spoke less Spanish, as half their time was devoted to speaking English to help with materials, mostly textbooks, written in English. Other students benefited from listening comprehension but had the least opportunity to speak due to the fact that the people with whom they worked insisted on practicing English whenever possible. Although most parties involved believe the program is highly successful, these limitations need to be better addressed in the future.

## **Culture**

The greater issues of social justice and a system which has inadequate resources for those on the margin allowed students to reflect in both negative and positive ways on their own cultures. In dealing with issues related to social justice, several students became so deeply involved that their other classes suffered. The extended hours they spent working with the families in dealing with public health agencies and local law enforcement agencies left many students feeling an overwhelming sensation of helplessness and frustration. Students expected that change would occur rapidly, and they also expected more sympathy from commu-

nity officials in matters like checking into exorbitantly high water bills. Therefore, in such a service-learning program, it is important to talk about limits, expectations, and perspectives for all those involved. On a positive note, students were able to facilitate the Hispanic migrant student registration in the city and county schools because they were able to identify the proper Hispanic surname to be used when addressing families. They, in a sense, were teaching culture as they explained to school officials that children should be addressed by the first, not the second, of the two last names on their certification papers. They also helped teachers understand that while many Hispanic migrant children are proficient in speaking English, reading comprehension skills take much longer to develop.

Students, while critical of what they perceived to be a lack of overall concern regarding the less fortunate in the community, commented that they felt very proud of the work that many concerned citizens and agencies were doing. The classroom visitors, the agency leaders, and local educators provided them with positive role models. One student who wrote, "There are three words that describe the staff and members of the Hispanic Baptist Mission: friendly, warm and charitable." This student is now president of the campus chapter of the organization "Bread for the World." A recurring theme was the reciprocal nature of the project. The students assisted their Hispanic neighbors, but several were hired by local agencies to continue their work on a paid basis.

### **Cultural Conflicts**

During the program, several cultural problems were encountered. The first involved an African-American student and the family from Oxaca she was working with. They had called her a "mollita," and she knew it was related to her color. She had asked an affluent Mexican woman, who told her it was a rude racial slur. The director of the local migrant agency explained to the class that while racism exists among some migrant workers, many Hispanic migrant workers use the term "mollita" to describe African-Americans. It is the context and the speaker that determine whether the term was used positively or pejoratively. This family obviously liked the student very much; so she was able to accept their apology, and the agency agreed to work with the family in educating them about racism in the United States.

The second incident involved a group of nursing students who were planning a health project for the migrant camps. The nursing students were involved in a service-learning project from the School of Nursing, and the Spanish student was translating as part of her foreign language service-learning project. Initially, the nursing students had planned to discuss sexually transmitted diseases. The student translator relayed her concerns about translating this material, as she had learned from class and her field work that health concerns regarding such private matters as intercourse are generally thought of as taboo, especially for discussion between young single women (students) and married men (migrant workers). As a result the nursing students changed their topic to dealing with pesticide poisoning.

One of the challenges still facing the service-learning class is that students tend to perceive their own experience as constituting the truth about the experience of others. One of the most prevalent examples was that students tended to project their childhood as a rule of thumb for others: "Esteban and Pedro need time to be children; they need to run, shout, play, and go to the park. We took them to play football like my Dad used to do with us." Students were initially unable to see the cultural bias implicated in such statements. They also made assertions such as "Hispanic battered women tend to be less emotionally involved," based on their one term experience with one family. The tendency for students to draw on the authority of their own experiences when interpreting data or issues seems to be commonly observed (Vadeboncouer et al., 1996.)

### **Interdisciplinary Benefits**

The interdisciplinary nature of the project provided many scholastic benefits. Whereas there was a general feeling that this was a worthwhile endeavor, many of the students began to grapple with the larger issues of social and economic justice. In their evaluations and final projects, they were able to contextualize theoretical concerns presented in other disciplines with regard to issues of inequality, national economic measures, and foreign governments. Final papers included commentary on poverty and class struggle issues, spatial constraints, zoning plans, insights regarding public education, and mainstreaming. Students were keenly observant, commenting on various factors: the absence of public transportation, the lack of sufficient lighting with which to do homework, extended family relationships and gender roles, and the higher expectations placed on older children especially in regard to child care. While tutoring Mexican junior high students on the Mexican-American War as described by the American history textbook, students were able to understand the practical applications of theoretical concepts like ethnocentrism and cultural relativity, and the maxim that history is written by the victors. Along the same lines, university students also learned from their various community partners why they had migrated to the United States and how they viewed the United States. Students learned firsthand that the civil wars they study in Hispanic Civilization classes leave living scars on the survivors who come here for political and economic refuge.

### **Conclusions**

There was a much greater tendency at the end of the term to see the migrant population as individuals, with unique histories, rather than as a group of "dark-skinned, lazy and quick-tempered people" (Skidmore, 1997, p.2). The intimacy of the home visits allowed for a closer inspection of cultural similarities and diversities. The South has generally been considered a place of tradition with a strong emphasis on the family. The students recognized the Hispanic migrant focus on family, especially extended and non-traditional families. Students found

many similarities between the South and Latin America. Family and honor were discovered to be common values. The rural background of most Hispanic migrant workers and the respectful attitude toward elders and those in authority were other commonalities several students noticed. A running comment through final papers dealt with the generosity of the families:

Lisa and I brought some Halloween treats to Pablo and Angela's [students they were tutoring] house. After studying we were cutting the pumpkin, letting the kids scoop out the seeds when Pablo fell backwards and smashed all the cupcakes. Selena [Pablo's mother] laughed for five straight minutes. The experience touched my heart. My father would have shouted, but Selena just smiled and laughed showing a generosity of spirit and love towards her family and that her "family values" were very centered. (Names have been changed to protect the individuals' privacy.)

Several students were more appreciative of the difficulty of being a working parent and raising children in today's society, especially on a very limited budget. Students were able to reflect on their own progress in developing cultural sensitivity:

When I first started this project I thought, "Why in the world do they have so many children?" Now I understand I was projecting my own values onto them, and I understand that not only are there many reasons people have big families, but that also there are many small Hispanic families and many big families outside the Hispanic community.

Six students, those going into the teaching profession were very attentive to the classroom environment and the teacher-student relationship. One student was particularly upset to find the Hispanic student she was tutoring to be in a desk facing the wall, isolated from the others. The class discussed ways she might approach the teacher and help her understand that the mandate to mainstream students to help them learn English was not being observed. This university student thought out the issue and in a calm and professional manner was able to work with the teacher and incorporate the Hispanic migrant student into the class circle.

All parties gain from the service-learning experience in the foreign language classroom. Twelve of the 23 students in the class signed up to study abroad in Mexico as a direct result of this experience. Institutional benefits include a higher rate of student retention, as students feel connected to the university and the community. Three of the students were considering transferring to another institution before the service-learning class. After their experiences they decided to stay, because, as they wrote in their evaluations, "It was the best experience

I've ever had at this university." "I feel a useful part of the community now." "I never knew there were neat opportunities like these available." The institution also benefits in that its image as a Community Partner is greatly enhanced as students are seen in a variety of settings volunteering to care for others.

The most direct benefit to the language learner is that the hesitancy to speak publicly in the target language is overcome, and once the fears about speaking a second language are dispelled, communication improves rapidly and students are motivated to continue practicing and studying. Roughly 30% of the students continue, in some form or another, to work with the migrant community on their own. The migrant children who have received tutoring help through the service-learning project have not only improved their grades but have also made a commitment to stay in school. Migrant families in the region now actively seek to participate in service-learning projects and have been instrumental in providing input for the development of an appropriate English as a Second Language Program in the school system. All the agencies involved in the service-learning project have now formed a community wide committee to address various regional needs such as more bilingual teachers. Service-learning in the foreign language classroom in theory and in practice enhances communication skills and serves to enhance the lives of all involved.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the US Department of Education, the National Migrant Education Program registered over 610,000 official Hispanic migrant children in 1997. For every one child officially registered, there are anywhere from three to six unofficial Hispanic migrants, making the Hispanic population, particularly the Mexican-American migrant population, the fastest growing population in the United States according to Ed Flueren, State Migrant Program Director (Georgia).

<sup>2</sup> For the beginning Spanish sequence, there is a small-scale service-learning project in which students must spend a total of three hours in the Hispanic community. They may attend a Spanish Mass, interview a native speaker (the use of 'Spanglish' is allowed at the 101 level), or they can tutor a Hispanic migrant child (one who is relatively verbal in English) or they may attend two showings of Spanish films or attend two Spanish dances. Because for most students this is a required course (unlike the upper division courses), many resent this part of class. However, roughly, 60% agree that it is a very eye-opening and worthwhile experience.

<sup>3</sup> Visitors included doctors, writers, drug agents, and a variety of people, either Hispanic or Non-Hispanic, who use Spanish in their jobs. The classroom visitors helped Spanish minors and majors identify and clarify actual career options and establish contacts.

<sup>4</sup> Liability is an issue, and there is not much written regarding this topic. Students sign waivers, and all possible dangers are clearly explained, such as going to unlit neighborhoods after dark on the weekends. Students who work with schools

purchase a \$7.00 insurance policy specifically designed to cover anything that may happen to them while at the local schools. There are risks involved, but they are minimized, given that the benefits far outweigh the downfalls.

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## Appendix 1

(Permission to reprint this information was granted by the Migrant Education Program.)

### Cultural Characteristics of Mexican American Migrant Children

**Eye to Eye Contact.** Many Mexican American migrant children will not look at an adult straight in the eye when they are being addressed. This is a show of respect and does not mean they are being rebellious or are not paying attention.

**Affection.** Young Mexican American migrant children are shown a lot of affection at home. They are constantly being touched, kissed, loved even by strangers. They expect this when they come to school. When teachers do not do this, it is interpreted as a rejection.

**Isolation.** Mexican American migrant children need a lot of personal attention. When a child is given a workbook and told to work by himself/herself, he/she feels rejected. The teacher, whenever possible, should provide the child with personal attention. At the same time, Mexican American children should be helped to understand that their teachers behave the way they do, because they have different habits and not because they dislike them.

**Freedom of Choice.** Some Mexican American migrant children when told to choose what they want to do next will end up doing nothing. The teacher may interpret this as a lack of interest and motivation on the part of the student. In fact, what it actually reflects is the children's confusion or lack of knowledge about what to do, since they expect to receive very concrete and explicit instructions from adults. Mexican American migrant children are used to a lot of structure and direction in their activities and will tend to feel uncomfortable in situations in which they are given freedom of choice.

**Family.** A Mexican American migrant child is very closely linked to his/her family. Just as the individual is prized in North American culture, so is the family in Mexican American culture. The child's primary function is to help the family. Thus, an older child may be kept home from school to care for younger children, or if money is needed, the child may skip school and go to work. When the child goes to school the following day, the North American teacher does not feel the child's excuse is very good. The North American teacher feels the child's primary responsibility is to go to school, while the Mexican American migrant parents feel that the older child's primary responsibility is to help the family. To North Americans, school is an extension of the home; to Mexican American migrants, school is an entirely different entity.

**Family Honor.** Family honor to a Mexican American migrant child is extremely important. Many times a Mexican American child is referred to as *a García*, González, etc. rather than by his first name. If someone insults a member of his/her family, the Mexican American child is expected to defend the family honor by dealing with the offender and, if necessary, by fighting with him/her.

**Tone of Voice.** The tone of voice is sometimes very important. Many times Mexican American migrant children complain that Anglo American teachers "yell" too much. This could be attributed to the fact that in Latin American cultures, "yelling" is one of the most potent weapons available to a teacher. Consequently these children get upset when the teacher starts yelling without first using other techniques, such as asking them several times in a quiet tone of voice to please stop misbehaving.

**How Teachers are Perceived.** Mexican American migrant adults and children perceive teachers as important symbols of authority and sometimes are viewed with awe. Teachers are not to be treated as someone equal, but as someone much superior. This is somewhat different from the view of Americans who see teachers and students somewhat closer in status. In the Mexican American migrant culture one does not bother superiors with too many questions or initiate discussions or conversations.

**Repetition.** This factor is looked at differently by a North American teacher and a Mexican American migrant child who come from dissimilar cultures. When a Mexican American migrant child is having trouble with pronunciation in English, the North American teacher, believing that the child will succeed only if the Mexican American migrant child keeps on trying (North American cultural pattern), has the student repeat a word several times. The Mexican American migrant student, embarrassed by repeated exposure to his/her mistakes, develops a negative attitude toward the particular word and, by extension, toward the language and the teacher.

### *Post script*

Since the publication of my article, “*Service-learning and Foreign Language Acquisition: Working with the Migrant Community*,” in *Dimension ‘99*, awareness of the Hispanic and migrant communities has increased in this nation. As a result, there has been a growing need for services and for better delivery of them. The results of the 2000 census, the construction of a wall along the U.S. and Mexican border, and the 2010 “Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act” amendment in Arizona have amplified the need to integrate cultural competency into the academic curriculum. As the number of Hispanic residents and families increases, so does the demand for graduates of language programs in the fields of education, social services, and business. However, in “Getting to Know You? Latino-Anglo Social Contact,” authors Welch and Sigleman (2000) show that social interaction of Latinos with Anglo and African-American cultures is low. Without structured opportunities the majority of university students find it difficult to develop relationships with Latinos and specifically with Hispanic migrants. The same hold true for most Latinos and Hispanic Migrant families who have few opportunities to develop relationships with Anglos and African Americans. At Valdosta State University (VSU), after graduation most of our language majors work directly or indirectly with Hispanic migrant families either by teaching in school systems or working in a federal, local, or state agency. Students often remark that the SPAN 4980 service-learning class has been the cornerstone of their preparation for these jobs. Faculty have found service learning to be an essential part of our program because it sets up opportunities for direct interaction between the university and the community.

The SPAN 4980 service-learning course I wrote about in 1999 continues in full force with some modifications. The course requires that students spend 20-30 volunteer hours tutoring, interpreting, or working in some capacity to help the

migrant community. Students record their hours and write a journal entry in Spanish for every hour volunteered, and we have regular class meetings to discuss the experiences. Today, 12 years after starting the SPAN 4980 service-learning based course, we have seen the course evolve into an essential part of the degree in foreign language education, the endorsement in English as a Second Language (ESL), and for Spanish degrees with professional tracks. In addition, the practicum has linked with various offices and departments, including the Wiregrass College ESL program, Colleges of Social Work and Nursing, and the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice. The course has been given the Best Practices in Services Award from the University System of Georgia and a Georgia Humanities Humanitarian of the Year Award. The goals of the SPAN 4980 have evolved into real community solutions and continued relationships with our host families, students, and institutions. In maintaining these relationships with the community every year, service-learning has become a program that involves community leaders in frequent meetings. Last semester we were asked to help organize efforts to count Latinos in the 2010 census. In this way, service-learning has given birth to a strong sense of identity. We are amigos, and we know, support, and learn from each other.

Most language textbooks do not go into much detail regarding the causes of immigration and the problems the migrant community faces, and these issues generally are not covered in academic forums. However, over half of the majors at VSU work with the migrant community after graduation in some capacity. This reality has led to changes in the program of study such as an increased focus on cultural competency and a greater emphasis on making sure the students understand the connection between the practicum, the service learning, and their major and career choices.

Our original goal focused on developing linguistic proficiency in Spanish, but through an assessment of journal entries, community needs, and program evaluation, we discovered that students spend more time speaking English to help partners develop proficiency in English. As the data came in, it was clear our students were getting jobs with the community based on their ability to interact with and their knowledge about the Hispanic community. We learned that the ability to be bicultural was very important for local service providers. Service-learning is a strategy for success where students and partners complement and advocate for each other and develop comprehensive strategies, creative approaches, and innovative partnerships to help ensure well-being and academic achievement. In studying students' journals and evaluations, a clear sense of appreciation for and knowledge of the local migrant community was evident. Using the ACTFL program requirements as a tool to evaluate students, a new model of assessment was developed to include cultural competency. In turn, the cultural competency led to networking and career preparation. One student put it this way,

It certainly made it easier to speak with migrant communities because I think that it is always a little bit awkward at first to try to put yourself into another culture. ... My experiences with the migrant community were absolutely the reason I was able to get the job I have.

The shift to the development of cultural competency in service-learning has become a cornerstone of both the language program and teacher preparation program at VSU. We require students to read *Enrique's Journey* (Nazario, 2007) a true story about the difficult but very common odyssey of a Honduran boy who braves numerous hardships while riding the *train of death* to reach his mother in the United States. The depth of material presented in *Enrique's Journey* helps students understand how and why many Hispanics come to the United States.

Through service-learning students write and speak about what they learn, and community members share knowledge they gather from university students. Service-learning helps strengthen ties between communities, and it has the potential to provide access to information to individuals who move in social circles different from our own. This circulation of cultural ideas and dispelling of stereotypical myths can be attributed to the strength of weak ties, an idea promoted in the article *Outcomes for Community Partners in an Unmediated Service-Learning Program* (Ethel, 2003). During the 2005 school year, students enrolled in the practicum course completed a class project entitled *Becoming Visible*, based on the *Literacy through Photography Project* at Duke University. The project not only strengthened ties between the university and K-12 students but also with the local art center and the media center. In addition to helping tutor in math, English, and science, our Spanish students helped children learn to use cameras as a tool and visual images as a means of expressing identity. They also helped young students develop their writing skills by formulating narratives. In the process students from VSU learned about Hispanic culture, including close family ties, joy in the moment, extended family relationships, the importance of celebration and communion with friends and families, and pride in heritage and identity. We discovered that most of the children we were tutoring were spending two to three hours a day on the school bus, and this time in transit often made it hard to motivate them to sit down and study after school. The university students also saw that all cultures share many things in common: growing up, adolescence, riding the bus, music, sports, family ties, and wanting to fit in and be an individual. Local Hispanic children and their families helped VSU students improve their Spanish, enhance their tutoring skills, and develop their cultural competency. The project opening and display of works was attended by parents, administrators, teachers, students, and children; and there was discussion about how the students in the community, many undocumented, might be able to attend the university.

Over the years we have refined our definition of cultural proficiency as an understanding of the relationship among the practices, products, and perspectives of the culture studied. We now define cultural competence as the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific practices and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings (Davis, 1997; Herbert 2006). This specific model shows that to become more culturally competent, the individual should (1) value diversity, (2) have the capacity for cultural self-assessment, (3) be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact, (4) continue to study and promote cultural knowledge, and eventually (5)

develop adaptations to service delivery reflecting an understanding of diversity between and within cultures. In the best case scenario only 10 % of university students ever interact with those of another culture in a study abroad or internship experience, and the average is slightly more than 1%; therefore, developing cultural competency at home and measuring it is difficult. We use a model that acknowledges that there is a process through which student pass, a development that occurs along a continuum from (1) cultural destructiveness, (2) cultural incapacity, (3) cultural blindness, (4) cultural pre-competence, (5) cultural competency, to (6) cultural proficiency (Davis, 1997).

At the beginning of the service-learning experience, most students assume a paternalistic posture toward migrant culture; some want to appear unbiased, but they still want to rescue and mainstream the Hispanic culture. Later students show an awareness of diversity within the Spanish-speaking world but still without much context and with very little direct experience. Class discussions and field work focus on learning strategies, cognitive development, the differences between primary and secondary learners and adult learners, and issues that arise with community partners, such as a lack of services or overwhelmed institutions. Students spend a lot of time working with their partners at school and or in the home. It is through service-learning that students are able to move toward cultural competence, first through initial language use and then by challenging their own assumptions and assessing themselves culturally. One student described the impact of the course.

[This course] was the single most life-changing 'class' in my college career. Having a degree in a language is much different than a degree in something like math. You cannot gain a language only on books and lectures; you must live it, and that is what this course did for me.

Although at first glance tutoring and socializing may seem less than rigorous in some academic circles, in fact, temporal, spatial, and relational values are key concepts in cross-cultural awareness. Reading about different perceptions regarding time, socializing, and family and experiencing these cultural phenomena are vastly different strategies. Students and community partners are in relationship with a diverse culture, making connections and comparisons within their respective cultures. They are given access to the hidden transcript of culture. Students experience the important position of family in Mexican culture, and they come to understand that being invited to a house means that a bond and trust have been established. Hispanic parents sometimes choose culturally dissimilar students as confidants, and they are able to inquire about the culture in south Georgia, the school culture, and other unique phenomena such as the pervasiveness of liberty, hair dye, body piercings, tattoos, dating, and other traits that teens in the U.S. exhibit. Migrant families learn about these cultural products, perspectives, and practices through social interaction. In a time of relative national paranoia,

the ability to work comfortably with those from diverse backgrounds, to communicate, and to circumlocute are valuable skills in the employment market.

Service-learning has not been immune to the shadow side of cross-cultural interactions. Perceptions of inequality can be reversed; in the migrant home initially it is the university student who is the outsider, but those feelings of discomfort and frustration are a definite part of becoming culturally competent. If the student understands through experience what the other culture feels on a daily basis, future service delivery will be improved. Students frequently make cultural assumptions related to productivity in their journal entries, with comments such as “I am not getting anything done” and “I am not doing enough to help Santos, am worried he’ll not pass.” However, the results show that the children improve in reading ability, retention, and homework completion. Students are fully aware of their dominant culture status and the benefits of being a legal citizen. Moreover, the media often stereotype Mexicans and migrants as gang members and dangerous. Students unlearn much of the culture of fear and distrust of public through expansion of their own mental maps of the community to include others. “I was nervous; I have never been in a Spanish only household,” is a typical response at the beginning of the service-learning course, but by the time they write the final entries, students have developed a comfort zone in which they feel a part of the family and of the territory in which the families move. There are Hispanic churches, *tortillerías* [tortilla bakery stores], Hispanic grocery stores, and hidden trailer parks.

The public school setting, while familiar to university students, is seen with new eyes. In discussion with teachers, they begin to understand the dilemma that teachers face when they are required to make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) although many of their students do not understand English. As a result, students found that Hispanics have learned to read the questions in standardized tests and look for the answers without ever reading the text. VSU students observed socialization issues as Hispanic children are forced to miss physical education time to get academic help, thereby sacrificing crucial time to relax and de-stress at school and further isolating them from other children. Although VSU students find that migrant children in the class setting have seen at least a 10% improvement in overall grade quality after working with community partners, and sometimes as much as 200%, these findings are not the norm. More than half of Hispanic students do not graduate high school, and the need to go beyond service-learning and be agents of change is clear (Georgia KIDS Count Study, 2005).

Developing cultural competency through service-learning is one way to make a difference in the diverse neighborhoods that comprise Georgia and the U.S. Students graduate with cultural proficiency that strengthens local institutions and their delivery of goods. University students who are excited about working with the migrant community bring that excitement into the work place. The affirmative impact on future language instruction and area efforts to unite people is creating a stronger bond between the university and the community, which in turn benefits everyone.

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